THE MUSLIM VOICE

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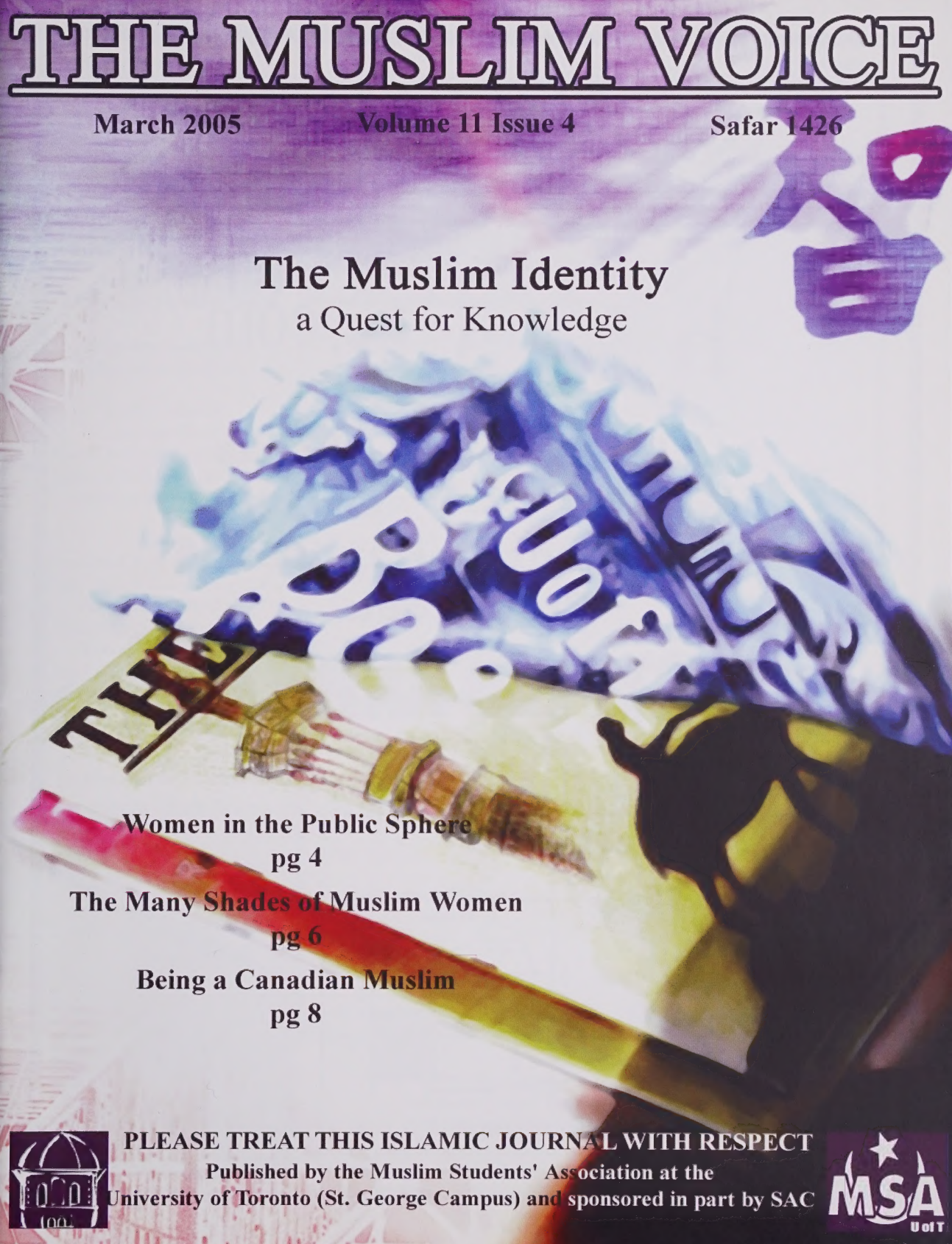
The Muslim Identity
a Quest for Knowledge



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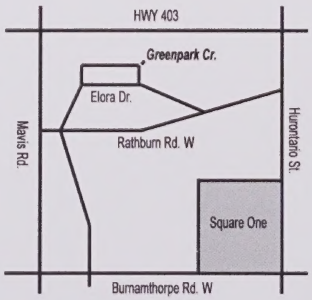

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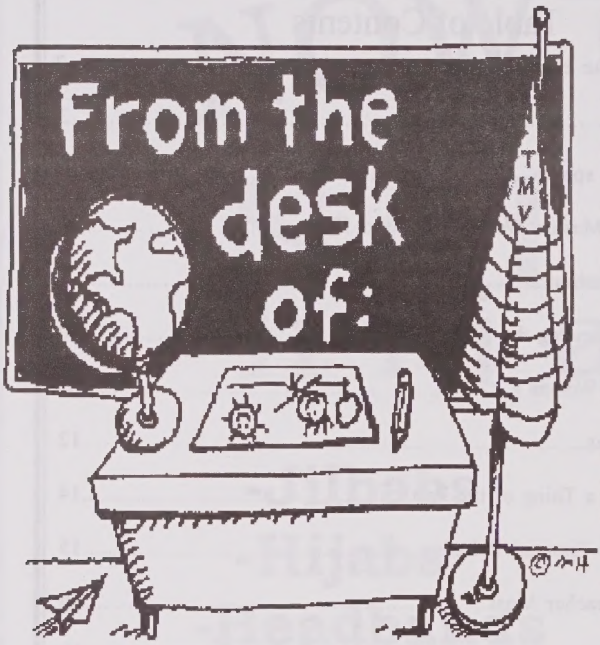

THE EDITOR

(The Question isn't why this poem is on this page, the question is: Why Not?)

Lines

I fidgeted in my seat inside the plane, and looked
down at the vast sands of Egypt.
The beauty of this wasteland was shocking;

who knew a bare land such as this could be beautiful
in its own right? As I stepped off the plane and into
this intense heat, I couldn't help but wish I was back

in Toronto, where the heat wasn't suffocating, and the
language familiar. Making the trip from Cairo to
Alexandria was exhausting: A five hour trip on a

crowded bus with the same annoying Arabic songs
repeating themselves on the speaker. We arrived at our
apartment late at night, jet-lagged and hungry.

The days passed and we entertained relatives I
remembered from our last visit, ones I did not, and
some I didn't even know existed.

I saw my nephew for the first time. We served our
guests tea in small cups without handles; I burned
myself several times.

I liked waking from sleep to the piercing echoes of
the Adhan being reciting by Muadhins from several
different masajid. We didn't need a prayer chart.

Friday prayers were crowded; people prayed in the
streets and the markets were empty, shops were
deserted during the one hour period on Fridays.

There was an internet cafe near where we were staying
I talked to my friend Sara for half an hour once. And
I showed her the crowded Egyptian streets outside the

cafe with a webcam. Most men in Egypt smoke; in cafes,
in malls, in the street, and wherever they please,
making it hard for me to breathe.

My grandfather smokes too.

The nights passed quickly, and our flight date quietly
inched closer. I started packing my suitcase the day
before we were to leave. The next day we were

typically very late and almost missed our bus. We
jumped onto the bus to Cairo, waving to cousins and
miscellaneous relatives that happened to be around at

the time, and then five hours later boarded our plane
with heavy hearts. In a while we were home; tired,
sad, and irritable, but home.

Though it has been a while since my return, the image
that remains vivid in my mind is that of my two-year-old
cousin, Mu'awiya, being knocked out in a matter of

minutes by the intense sweetness of a bite of
basbousa. I remember the white sands of Sidi Crere
sliding apart under my weight and making way for my

feet. And the blue blue water splashing against the
shore in intimidating waves, wiping the uppermost
layer of sand into its blue vastness, reminding me of

how God wipes away sins when He forgives. I guess,
maybe I just miss the chaos that comes along with an
enormous family.

As I live and experience, I add to the puzzle that is
my life, continuously forming a more complex and
complete picture of who I am. My trip added a piece to

the ever-growing puzzle, but there are still so many
pieces that have not been placed. I feel there is so
much of life to live, yet so little, for it is God who

has decided our fates and when
we will leave this life.
Some evidence of my journey does remain:

a solitary small jar filled with softly coloured
seashells sitting on my shelf, and a stack of
photographs. Frozen images in my mind.

Asmaa Hussein

President's Message

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

My beloved brothers and sisters in Islam,
Assalamu Alaikum warahmatuLahi wabarakatuhu,

It was like yesterday when I was asked to write the president's welcome message and it is today when I'm asked to write the farewell message. Believe it or not a whole year passed! To you my beloved brothers and sisters, to your hearts, I write these words:

And I was asked to write...

The memories of a year at hindsight
The laughter and tears, the angers and delights
The depth of valleys and mountains of heights
The dreams, the passions, the prayers and plights

Some of past year's achievements...

An iftar in Ramadan happening every night
Orphans being sponsored, a child flying a kite
Tsunami victims, we hear the call & feel the plight
Posting of flyers & updating the website
Islam Awareness Week and the henna night
Spiritual Muslim scientists stronger than the knights
Bonds of brotherhood & sisterhood becoming tight

The lessons we have learned...

Behind the thick clouds the sun is so bright
See with your heart, and not with your sight
For truth for justice always stand up and fight
From the distraction of "Dunya" ask for a respite
the flame of iman in your heart ignite
To the Quran and Sunnah hold firmly, hold tight
Always trust in your Lord, the Exalted in Might

Brothers and sisters, as the term of current executives is coming to an end, we soon will pass the trust to you. We trust that the banner of Islam will always be held high at the University of Toronto. We tried to do our best this year and pray that those that will hold the banner after us will learn from our shortcomings and build on our successes. The MSA, is much bigger than a student club. It is a leadership institute, brotherhood/sisterhood factory, outreach techniques inventory and most importantly a great opportunity for you to get closer to Allah (SWT).
On my behalf and the behalf of the great team that Allah (SWT) has blessed me with, I ask you for your forgiveness if we said, organized, or did anything that offended you or did not satisfy your aspiration. God is our witness that we did our best to earn His obedience and serve the great community we represent on campus. Anything we have done and is right is from the guidance of Allah (SW), and anything we have done and is wrong is from the evils of our nafs and the shaitan and we ask for forgiveness for that.
The banner is in your hands now...hold it high and never let it fall

Mohamad Alameddine
MSA-UofT President 04-05

Women in the Public Sphere

In Islam there are rules to regulate every aspect of life. Modesty and modest behaviour are important objectives, and there are rules and guidelines for both men and women in this regard. The *hijaab* is an obligation on Muslim women for the preservation of their dignity and honour. To some, however, along with wearing *hijaab* and carrying herself modestly, a woman should also avoid being seen or heard. This, they argue, is the best state of modesty. They believe that women should not be in mosques, not speak up, nor should they go out of their homes unless it is necessary. Women, therefore, do not belong in the public arena, for it is the masculine domain.

This article examines the role of women in the public sphere. It looks at the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the first generation of Muslims to help shed light on the question of whether Muslim women were active participants in the community of the early believers, or whether they were encouraged to remain in their homes. There is no question the first generation was the best of believers, and the Prophet (peace be upon him) was the ideal human being. Therefore, whatever positions they adopted will be the example for us to follow.

Women speaking up:

It is of course ordered by the Qur'an that women should speak only in a dignified manner when addressing males, for purposes of modesty. Islam places so much emphasis on the honour of women that it is easy to see the benefit of this rule. But can we, by extension, say that women should be encouraged not to speak out at all? Here we shall look at the famous story of the woman who asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) to take her hand in marriage:

Narrated by Sahl bin Sad As-Sa'idi:

While I was (sitting) among the people in the company of Allah's Apostle a woman stood up and said, "O Allah's Apostle! She has given herself in marriage to you; please give your opinion of her." The Prophet did not give her any reply. She again stood up and said, "O Allah's Apostle! She has given herself (in marriage) to you; so please give your opinion of her. The Prophet did not give her any reply. She again stood up for the third time and said, "She has given herself in marriage to you, so give your opinion of her." So a man stood up and said, "O Allah's Apostle! Marry her to me."..."*

[Related by Bukhari]

First, we notice that in this narration the woman was sitting in a gathering of believers with Rasulullah (peace be upon him). In other narrations it is stated that she approached the Prophet (peace be upon him). The point to notice here is that the woman spoke to Rasulullah (peace be upon him) in front of the gathering and asked for his hand in marriage. What did the believing men think of this forwardness? The opinion of Anas, a companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is given in the *hadith* narrated by Thabit Al-Banani:

I was with Anas while his daughter was present with him. Anas said, "A woman came to Allah's Apostle and presented herself to him, saying, 'O Allah's Apostle, have you any need for me (i.e. would you like to marry me)?' "Thereupon Anas's daughter said, "What a shameless lady she was! Shame! Shame!" Anas said, "She was better than you; she had a liking for the Prophet so she presented herself for marriage to him."

[Related by Bukhari]

Here, Anas defends the woman's conduct, explaining that her goodness came from being straightforward in asking for something that she wanted. This example shows that a woman of the early community did not fear speaking out, even to ask for something that many women cannot bring themselves to ask for. It is also important to note that she was respected by the men who knew of this situation at the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Women in the mosque:

We have seen that some mosques in Canada do not have a place for women, or do not allow women much space within the mosque. This is unfortunate because if one were to read the *hadith*, one would realize that women regularly attended prayers in the Prophet's mosque in Medina. First of all, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is known to have said:

"If the wife of anyone of you asks permission to go to the mosque, he should not forbid her."

[Related by Bukhari]

Also, several *hadith* make it clear that women were present in the mosque on many occasions. Here are two examples:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

"When I rise to lead the prayer, I wish to go on at length; however, if I hear a young child crying, I shorten it instead so as not to cause hardship to the child's mother"

[Related by Bukhari, Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, al-Nasaa'i, and Ahmad]

Narrated 'Amr bin Al-Harith:

Zainab, the wife of 'Abdullah said, "I was in the Mosque and saw the Prophet (p.b.u.h) saying, 'O women! Give alms even from your ornaments.' Zainab used to provide for 'Abdullah and those orphans who were under her protection. So she said to 'Abdullah, "Will you ask Allah's Apostle whether it will be sufficient for me to spend part of the Zakat on you and the orphans who are under my protection?" He replied "Will you yourself ask Allah's Apostle?" (Zainab added): So I went to the Prophet and I saw there an Ansari woman who was standing at the door (of the Prophet) with a similar problem as mine. Bilal passed by us and we asked him, 'Ask the Prophet whether it is permissible for me to spend (the Zakat) on my husband and the orphans under my protection.' And we requested Bilal not to inform the Prophet about us. So Bilal went inside and asked the Prophet regarding our problem. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) asked, "Who are those two?" Bilal replied that she was Zainab. The Prophet said, "Which Zainab?" Bilal said, "The wife of 'Adullah (bin Masud)." The Prophet said, "Yes, (it is sufficient for her) and she will receive a double reward (for that): One for helping relatives, and the other for giving Zakat."

[Related by Bukhari]

These *ahadith* prove that the mosque in Medina was truly a centre of the entire community, shared by men, women and children alike in the early days of Islam.

Women in Community Gatherings:

The following *hadith* makes clear the Prophet's attitude (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) towards women participating in the gatherings of believers:

Narrated Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her):

*(On 'Id) We used to forbid our virgins to go out (for 'Id prayer). A lady came and stayed at the Palace of Bani Khalaf. She mentioned that her sister was married to one of the companions of Allah's Apostle who participated in twelve Ghazawats along with Allah's Apostle and her sister was with him in six of them. She said, "We used to dress the wounded and look after the patients." She (her sister) asked Allah's Apostle , "Is there any harm for a woman to stay at home if she doesn't have a veil?" He said, "She should cover herself with the veil of her companion and she should take part in the good deeds and in the religious gatherings of the believers." When Um 'Atiyya came, I asked her. "Did you hear anything about that?" Um 'Atiyya said, "Bi Abi" and she never mentioned the name of Allah's Apostle without saying "Bi Abi" (i.e. 'Let my father be sacrificed for you'). We asked her, "Have you heard Allah's Apostle saying so and so (about women)?" She replied in the affirmative and said, "Let my father be sacrificed for him. He told us that unmarried mature virgins who stay often screened, or unmarried young virgins and mature girls who stay often screened, should come out and take part in the good deeds and in the religious gatherings of the believers. But the menstruating women should keep away from the Musalla (praying place)."** I asked her, "The menstruating women?" She replied, "Don't they present themselves at 'Arafat and at such and such places?"*

[Related by Bukhari]

It is clear from this *hadith* that it is extremely important that women make contributions to society, so important that even being too poor to afford proper clothing to go out in public is not a sufficient excuse. Women, therefore, must not be prevented from taking part in the community, but encouraged to do so.

There are many *ahadith* that prove that women of the Prophet's time acted in the community alongside the male believers, while adhering to the laws of Islam. This proves that women were part of the public arena and were not excluded and forced to remain hidden within their homes. The early believers, both men and women were given separate roles in Islam with equity, but were not living out their lives in separate single-gender communities. Therefore, we must look to their example and try to emulate what the best generation of believers did in their lives, and not look for anything beyond what Rasulullah (peace be upon him) and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) have given us.

---

*The woman refers to herself in third person instead of in first person in this narration

** Please note that this article and the quoting of this *hadith* is not stating a position on the question of menstruating women going into the *musallah*. This topic is more involved and there are many scholarly dissertations which you should refer to.

Khalidah Ali
Year 3, History & Philosophy
University of Toronto (St. George)

The Many Shades of Muslim Women

Many of the misconceptions surrounding Islam pertain to the role of women in society. An interview with Dr. Aliya Khan corrects these misconceptions.

Misconceptions and false stereotypes distort the image of women in Islam to such a degree that it is beyond recognition. We must correct these false ideas regarding Islam and women. Rather than redundantly stating what the rights of women are, we must strive to project the true image through our own example. We should fight back the false stereotypes, which project women as being capable of only serving as the household caretaker.

In fact, the Muslim women scholars of the past were at the forefront of education and scientific development. We can project the true status of women in Islam by presenting the noble examples of the achievements of Muslim women in the dawn of the Islamic Era. We need to illustrate the skills, talents and achievements of leading Muslim women in positions of authority and learn from their achievements and success in both *Deen* and *Dunya*. The women of the past utilized their abilities to the fullest. One such wonderful personality was Ayesha (May Allah be pleased with her), whose expertise included medicine, mathematics and jurisprudence. She was consulted for advice on legal issues, notably in regard to inheritance problems. She had a great capacity to solve complicated legal issues with justice, demonstrating her analytical skills. Khadijah (May Allah be pleased with her) was a remarkable businesswoman and used her resources most effectively. There are many other figures whose examples serve as guiding stars for Muslim women. It is important to realize that exemplary figures do exist in today's world from whom lessons can be learnt. One such figure is Dr. Aliya Khan with whom I had the wonderful opportunity of interviewing.

Following is a very brief description of Dr. Aliya Khan's accomplishments to date. She is currently an Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine in the Divisions of Endocrinology and Geriatrics at McMaster University. She is also the Director of the Calcium Disorders Clinic. She serves as the founding Chair for the Canadian Panel of International Society of Clinical Densitometry (ISCD) and Chair of the ISCD Certification Council. She obtained her MD from University of Ottawa with honors and completed postgraduate training and a research fellowship at University of Toronto. She has published over 60 scientific papers on osteoporosis and parathyroid disease. She is a consultant to the Ontario Ministry of Health and is regularly invited to chair national and international scientific meetings on bone disease. The interview taken is paraphrased and summarized below:

1. *Can you please provide a brief background about yourself?*

I grew up in Ottawa where I received my elementary and high school education. I was always interested in science and math as these disciplines helped in understanding our environment. From an early age I loved reading and learning. As a child I would spend hours in the library enjoying story books and science fiction. I was accelerated through two grades in school and was accepted into Medicine at the age of 18. I graduated from Medical school at 22 years of age and then moved to Toronto for my postgraduate training. I am married and have 3 beautiful children, Alhamdulillah (Praise be to God). During my teenage years I would question the purpose of life. I did not want to simply follow my parents' faith blindly. I began to study Islam in comparison to other ways of life. I would read the Qur'an with translation and would get goose-bumps on realizing that these were the words of our Creator. Reading the Qur'an with translation reaffirmed my faith. I realized how fortunate I was to have been shown the light of Islam.

2. *What is your advice to the Muslim community with regard to choosing teaching as their profession? Is there a need in the community of more teachers/ professors, and why?*

It is very important to consider a role as an educator as this provides one with the opportunity to guide and share knowledge with others. If I hadn't been a doctor, I would have been a teacher. Islam emphasizes the importance of education and elevates the status of teachers to the highest degree. We need to encourage students to consider a career in teaching. However, if you are in another profession, try to become a professor and teach those subjects and achieve excellence in your field. Because that is the mark of Muslim - to excel in whatever she or he does.

3. *Did you find Islam and its teachings helpful in achieving this level of education and profession?*

Islam enabled me to achieve my goals, and to be a successful physician. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said: "You are not a believer unless you love for others what you love for yourself" (Bukhari, Kitabul Eeman). This saying helps me in my day to day practice. It helps me to make the best treatment decisions for my patients. It helps me to be a better teacher, daughter, spouse, parent, sister, friend, colleague and neighbour. Islam enabled me to achieve this level of success as Islam emphasizes honesty , hard work and compassion to all people and all of God's creation.

God says:

Whosoever kills a person... it shall be as if he has killed all mankind; and whoso gave life to one, it shall be as if he had given life to all mankind

[Qur'an, 5:32]

If an individual has an Islamic personality then he/she will have the qualities needed to be successful in this world and in the next. This verse helped me in choosing Medicine as my career as I recognized that as a physician, I would have many opportunities to help my fellow brothers and sisters of all races and religions and to earn God's pleasure. If an individual has an Islamic personality then he/she will have the qualities needed to be successful in this world and in the next. It is crucial to use time wisely. This kept me focused and enabled me to achieve my goals

4. *In your opinion, is there any restriction in Islam on a Muslim woman in terms of getting herself examined by a male doctor?*

Women always prefer to be examined by female physicians; however, there are circumstances where a female doctor is not available. In such a situation the patient may have no other choice but to be examined by a male doctor, which is permissible in this scenario. Muslim men and women physicians led the development of advances in surgery. The father of surgery was in fact a Muslim physician named Az-Zahrawi – he developed the surgical instruments needed for deliveries in the 10th century in Muslim Spain – these surgical techniques and instruments were introduced into European medicine by this famous Muslim physician. Rusa was a renowned Muslim woman physician who wrote a textbook on women's diseases in the 7th century. It is important to remember that the purpose of seeing a physician is to save a life. Women must keep the purpose of the examination in mind and not hesitate to seek medical care when needed.

5. *Which women figures were you inspired by?*

There are a number of women who have been leaders in the past. Ayesha (May Allah be pleased with her) was gifted with great intelligence; she was recognized as a scholar and a leader in jurisprudence and in medicine. If there was a controversial issue, Ayesha (May Allah be pleased with her) would be consulted to determine the appropriate ruling. She was known for her justice in determining rulings. Khadija (May Allah be pleased with her) was another great personality – she used her wealth and influence to help the poor and under-priviledged as she devoted herself to the service of mankind.

6. *There were many Muslim 'inventors' in the medical field in the past; why are Muslims lagging behind today?*

the downfall of the Muslims began when the Muslim society became corrupted and deviated from the path of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Allah (Glory be to Him) informs us in the Qur'an that whatever calamity befalls us is because of what our own hands have wrought. But at the same time, Allah is forgiving and most merciful. As the Muslims left their religious practices and their love for material wealth increased, they began to lose their position as the leaders of scientific advancement. As the society began to degenerate and lost its principles of justice and truth, the Muslim lands fell at the hands of the Mongols and the colonial powers, which destroyed the Muslim libraries, slaughtered the intellectuals and enslaved the minds of the people.

7. *Do you think our community needs to change their present lifestyle with regard to health and exercise?*

People of different ethnic backgrounds may not be as knowledgeable about health and advances in current medical knowledge. Women of all backgrounds need to ensure that they are aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles, diets and exercise. Today, one of the major issues is the problem with obesity. Islam has the answer to this problem. The Prophet (Peace be upon him) said that one should eat in moderation, filling a third of the stomach with food, a third with liquid and keep a third full of air. If we followed this advice, weight problems would not be as large an issue in the community. Islam also teaches us to be active. The Prophet (Peace be upon him) used to walk, swim and go horseback riding. There are descriptions of how he raced with Ayesha (May Allah be pleased with her). It is important for us to take time out for walks and sports and to ensure that our family members are also involved in physical activity. Healthy diets are also important in maintaining good health. As a bone specialist, I emphasize the importance of a good intake of milk and dairy products. This is also stressed in Islam and in the *Sunnah*

8. *I have seen that you balance everything quite well masha'Allah (as God wills); how do you attain that balance between family life, professional life and community involvement?*

You need to determine what you want to achieve in life, and then focus on those steps which will take you to your goal. Try to reduce dead time, which is time spent on activities which do not help you in achieving your goals. Time with family is very important if one of your goals is to have a strong family unit. Instead of wasting time watching TV, it would be better to spend that time reading or playing with your children. Life is full of choices and we have to ensure that we make the best choices for ourselves and for our family members. As we go through life, priorities will change; during certain time periods, certain areas will be of greater priority,

Continued on Page 9

Being a Canadian Muslim

Canadian Muslim. What does that term mean? Is it possible for one to be a Muslim and a Canadian? Well, let's look at the words one by one.

A Muslim is someone who submits his/her or her/his (political correctness is important in Canada, you understand) will to Allah (Glory be to Him). This is achieved by obeying the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Now what about being a Canadian? Well, a Canadian is someone who enjoys good beer, loves bacon and eggs for breakfast, and spends Friday nights partying at a club.

Therefore, the two are clearly not compatible.

Just kidding!

Canada stands for human rights, tolerance, respect for the environment and other such noble ideals. As such, Islam and Canada have plenty in common. Sure, there isn't a 100% match, but there is enough common ground for Muslims to be proud Canadians as well as proud Muslims.

We have plenty of rights in this country. We live freely as Muslims, we can pray, fast, give *zakat*, leave for *hajj* when we want (depending on the Saudis of course), build Mosques, do *da'wah*, run for political office or jog to our regular offices, and even have a huge conference in the Skydome.

We have plenty to be grateful for in this country. Being in Canada and being a Canadian Muslim is a blessing from Allah (Glory be to Him). Canada has no colonial past, making it stand apart from Britain and the likes. Nor is it in the process of creating one now, making it stand apart from America.

Canada has a strong reputation as a peacemaker and an all around good guy/gal (sorry political correctness again). As such, we have no real enemies. Who would attack us? The terrorists have no beef with us and the Americans, well, they don't want it.

Just think what our American and British brothers and sisters have to go through because of their countries' involvement in Iraq. Our former Prime Minister Jean Chretien did the courageous thing and refused to participate. In reality though, we're probably not in Iraq because neither the Brits nor the Americans could figure out what Chretien was saying. Yes, yes, I know, *Astighfirallah* (God forgive me). This is the problem with Muslims these days. When a Westerner stands up for them they don't thank him, they make fun of him. But hey, Canadians have got to have a sense of humour.

Muslims make up a large minority in Canada and we want a greater say in society. We want to be accepted in the mainstream. There has been recognition of this at certain levels in the West and some Westerners have definitely tried to include us in their social fabric. The results have been interesting.

A few *Eid*'s ago The Bay had an *Eid* sale. I heard they even tried putting up some *Eid* décor, sort of like they do for Christmas. There were mixed reactions to this. It was flattering to some Muslims, but others felt uncomfortable at the prospect of *Eid* being commercialized like Christmas.

This kind of reminds me of designer *hijabs* in Europe by Gucci and Calvin Klein. Think about it. Designer *hijabs*! And by *those* companies, of all!

It's not just Westerners though. What's the deal with *halal* pepperoni? Look people, pepperoni is pork. Cutting beef into small round circles and calling it pepperoni doesn't make it so. What will they try next? *Halal* beer? (Oh wait, I heard that was tried too). Or perhaps we'll pass off grape juice as *halal* wine?

I don't want to sound like a fundamentalist here but…

It's okay to be a Western Muslim but imitating the *Kuffar* in practices that are *haraam* is a bit silly. (I'm referring specifically to alcohol and pork here).

Cultural diversity is fine in Islam so long as religion is on top and culture is below. Culture must submit to Islam – not the other way around.

Let's be Canadian Muslims. But let's not give up the Muslim part. We, in Canada, are in a unique position to carve out a uniquely Western Islamic culture - basically, Islam with a Western flavour. Sort of like Islam in Indonesia with its Indonesian flavour, and Islam in the Indian sub-continent with its Indian flavour.

Islam is a religion for all humanity and humanity is a diverse bunch. Islam is seen in many cultural garbs the world over without compromising core ideals and beliefs.

That being said, it is also true that culture in many parts of the world has played havoc with Islam. Harmful cultural practices have unfortunately been made part of Islam. This is a danger and we must be vigilant - hence my earlier warnings. Let's be vigilant but let's not be stagnant.

In the West we have to deal with people who call themselves "modern" Muslims, "moderate" Muslims, or "secular" Muslims. Personally, I find these labels a bit troublesome. What happened to being simply Muslim? The term 'Canadian Muslim' simply means a Muslim who is from Canada and who may also have cultural habits that can be called Canadian. What on earth do the other labels denote? I have an idea as to where people calling themselves secular are coming from (although I believe the term "secular Muslim" to be an oxymoron), but what about moderate? What's a moderate Muslim? In the Qur'an, Allah (Glory be to Him) refers to us as a moderate nation. Therefore, the term "moderate Muslim" is a bit redundant since being Muslim is about being moderate. I won't even begin to guess as to what a "modern Muslim" is.

Canada is a diverse country. And what is also clear is that Muslims are a diverse people. Diversity is a double-edged sword. Diversity can be a strength, following the two heads are better than one idea, or it can be a weakness, when the two heads refuse to get along. Let's do the smart thing and work together. With our eyes open, Insha'Allah, we can do something special in this country and history will remember the "Canadian Muslims."

Fahad Kamal
Year 2, NMC
University of Toronto (St. George)

Dr. Aliya Khan Continued from page 7

such as spending time with children when they are young. Spending time learning about our faith is also a very important goal and if this is a priority then we should ensure that we take steps to achieve this goal. I try to keep my priorities focused and use the Holy Qur'an as the guide in my life.

9. *Do you have any comments on the comment made by people that a woman's role is restricted to household chores?*

To believe that women are limited to housework is to not understand the message of Islam. God created everyone to worship Him, not to serve man. Our Prophet (peace be upon him), who carried God's last message to mankind, shared in the household chores. Today, in some areas of the world where there is poverty and ignorance, men have imposed their ideas on uneducated women. In Islam, women are equal to men spiritually – we have differing roles and responsibilities as we are different physically and emotionally. However, Islam has confirmed in black and white the equality of women to men as stated in the Qur'an:

I shall not lose sight of the labor of any of you who labors in My way , be it man or woman; each of you is equal to the other.

[Qur'an, 3 :195]

10. *What is your opinion of people who say there is no place for religion or God in science?*

That person has, unfortunately, a very narrow-minded view of life. If you learn about science, you'll see God, because He is the Creator. If you see a beautiful painting, you know that the likelihood of the paint colors forming such a piece of artwork on their own is not likely. There was a design and a creator behind the picture. The whole world around us is much more complex than a beautiful painting and this also has a Creator. We understand the greatness of the Creator when we study the beauty of His creation.

11. *Have you realized during your medical practice that there is evidence of a kind of spiritual healing, that is apart from just the medicine?*

Yes, of course. There are so many things doctors don't know. The knowledge we have now is just the tip of the iceberg; it is very limited. In medicine, two patients may have the same disease and receive the same treatment; however, one may die and the other may be cured. Life and death are in God's hands. Only Allah (Glory be to Him) can determine our fate. The physician can not determine his own destiny so how can he determine the destiny of others?

Jazak'Allah Khair, Dr. Aliya, for taking time out to give us such valuable advice.

Samar F. Javid
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Univeristy of Toronto (St. George)

MIRACLES OF THE HOLY QURAN

The number of times the words or their meanings are mentioned in The Qur'an:

Al-Dunya This world: 115	*Al-Rajul* Man: 24
Al-Akhira The hereafter: 115	*Al-Mar'ha* Women: 24
Al-Mala'ikah Angels: 88	*Al-Shahr* Month: 12
Al-Shayateen Satan: 88	*Al-Yahom* Day: 365
Al-Hayat Life: 145	*Al-bahr* Sea: 32
Al-Maout Death: 145	*Al-bar* Land: 13

If we add up the total words of both "sea" and "land" we get 45. Now if we do a simple calculation:
32/45 X 100% = 71.11111111% (Sea)
13/45 X 100% = 28.88888888% (Land)

Above is what we know today as the percentages of water (Sea) and Land in the world. Yet another miracle in the Quran!

David Suzuki on "Renewing the Sacred Balance"

Taking responsibility for our own actions

At the Islamic Foundation in Markham, 68-year-old David Suzuki speaks to an audience of Muslims, Christians, Jews, as well as some environmentalists of various religious denominations. Suzuki lectures with wisdom befitting his years, but while most his age are into their physical and mental declines, Suzuki speaks with the strength, passion and vigour of a young man.

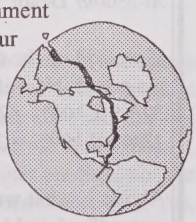
David's message was clear and simple. He called for people to realize that we are each individually responsible for the health of the environment that we share. He implored for the understanding that "whatever we do to our environment, we do directly to ourselves."

Suzuki brought to our attention the fact that our very bodies are constructed and maintained by physical materials derived from our surrounding environment. You eat a carrot, and the vitamins and minerals from that carrot go into your bloodstream and are used to build your flesh. Drink some milk, and the calcium is used to maintain your bones. Drink some water; the water hydrates you. You're over 60% water. Breathe, and the air you're breathing is entering your bloodstream and that blood is flowing into every corner, every recess of your body. Human beings are fused to their environment not unlike a fetus to its mother while inside her womb. This is why the Native Americans call the earth "mother earth."

David made the following statement, which, at first, may seem a bit strange.

"We framed the environmental problem the wrong way. There is no environment [way] *out there* ... [that] we have to manage our interaction with... There is no separation. We are the environment. And whatever we do to the environment, we do directly to ourselves."

David is saying that because the environment flows in and out of us, and because our bodies are constructed of the environment, in effect, we physically *are* the environment. Yet we're poisoning our environment. We're polluting it and destroying it. Thus we are effectively destroying ourselves.



Let us revisit the example of the baby in the womb. The womb is the baby's environment; the child's very flesh is built from the ambience that the mother provides. If the mother poisons herself with alcohol or cigarette smoke, then she poisons the environment of the unborn child and those toxins enter and become part of the constitution of that child.

When we poison our environment, we are force-feeding our "mother" cigarettes and alcohol *while we are still inside* her womb. And while we may not feel the effects of our mother's poisoning before we are delivered (i.e. when we die), we know that the brothers and sisters that succeed us will suffer.

Pollutants are being pumped into the air in millions and millions of pounds. Pollutants are being dumped into our waters so that we cannot even swim in our lakes. Our environment is being poisoned daily.

Shattered worldview

Most people today live with a shattered worldview. Suzuki writes that as people with shattered worldviews, "We fail to recognize causal relationships and therefore feel no responsibility."

In his speech, David related how he and a film crew decided to visit an emergency ward on a "smog alert" day in Toronto. As he expected, the ward was filled with young and elderly people suffering from asthma attacks. David pointed out that many of the patients were driven by concerned and caring relatives in SUVs.

Suzuki commented: "They live in a shattered world, where it doesn't occur to them that their very lifestyle is a part of the problem of their asthmatic parents."

What are the environmental repercussions and socio-economic consequences of buying Nike shoes? Of shopping at Wal-Mart? Of buying apples in the winter? Do we know? Do we even care?

"Every purchase and every use of a purchase has consequences that reverberate around the world. We just aren't seeing them. And that's the problem," Suzuki writes in his weekly column, "Science Matters" (see www.davidsuzuki.org).

Continued on page 21

The Hijab: a Muslim Woman's Identity:

How a simple cloth can inform a person of the very nature of a woman's soul

Oh Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons: This is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.
[Quran, 33:59]

Ask any sister and she'll tell you that her *hijab* plays an important role in her life. Even if it's only a feeling, there is something about it that contributes to her life in some significant way. But as most people probably don't realize, the *hijab* in itself provides a Muslimah with a portion of her very identity.

It seems simplistic to say that a garment could possibly contribute to a person's sense of who he or she is, but the *hijab* is far from your average piece of clothing. It acts as a testimony of the faith of the sister wearing it; it's a protection for her, an unfailing reminder of the woman that she should always strive to be. While it may look like just another piece of clothing on the outside, upon deeper examination, it becomes clear that the characteristics of a sister's *hijab* mirror her characteristics with uncanny precision.

The first and most basic condition of *hijab* is that it should cover the woman's entire body except for her hands and face. Here, it exemplifies for us the characteristic of the protected, valued sister. A woman is an essential part of the Muslim society, and her *hijab* reminds her of the importance of protecting herself from the evils of this world, including the faults of vanity and impurity.

A second characteristic of the *hijab* is that it should not be transparent or thin. At the same time, it should not be bold or bright so as to grab one's attention. This seems to be the exact characterization of the Muslim sister. Though she doesn't grab attention, and may not stand out in a crowd, she is a person of substance and vision. She is not someone that can be disregarded, seen through or overlooked. Her ideas are noticed, and are able to make a difference, though her outward appearance need not be. It is not the shape of the vessel, but rather its contents that matter. It is not the external picture of the sister, but rather the goodness of her heart and the sincerity of her deeds that should be considered, and these are the attributes that will be taken into account on the Day of Judgment:

Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily to him will We give a new Life, and life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions.
[Quran, 16:97]

The *hijab* is worn such that it does not resemble the man's clothing. This is important to remember, for brothers and sisters alike, because it clearly lays out for us a primary principle in our religion by which we can live our lives: men and women are different. This condition of our garments reminds us that women are not "smaller, weaker men," but rather individuals, who should be considered as such, and are in the light of Islam.

Like the Muslim woman, the *hijab* is characterized as being distinct from the dress of the disbelievers. Muslim women should look different than non-Muslims. It is, however, important to look deeper and notice what this difference means. The Muslim's characteristics are not the same as the non-Muslim's, even if the only difference between them is their unwavering faith in Allah (Glory be to Him). The differences exhibited in the Muslim sister's outerwear remind her of the importance of maintaining this difference in her inner being. She must not succumb to the temptations that this world has to offer, but should rather be proud of her faith and her vigilance in it.

Finally, the *hijab* is not to be worn as a means of gaining repute or to show off to the public. This fact reminds us of a fundamental concept of our religion: that life is not lived for others. The sister is reminded that what is important in this world is not what people think of us or of how we dress, but rather that we do the deeds that will please our Lord - deeds that will inevitably be pleasing to us as well. Being a slave to the current fashion is not as important as being a slave to Allah (Glory be to Him).

In a world as hectic as this one can get, with studies, work, family and the toils of carrying on, it can become difficult to find oneself or even to remember who one really is. In the gift of the *hijab*, sisters have been given a constant reminder of the ideals they should aspire to reach and the distinct place that they hold in Islaam. If you were to have a gem, so beautiful that light cascades through it like a million tiny waterfalls, you would protect it and ensure that no one could harm it in any way. So is the *hijab* to the sister: a protection, a commandment from our Creator that is really a blessing upon His creation. In the words of our dear Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

"*The world and all things in it are precious, and the most precious thing in the world is a virtuous woman.*"
(Related by Ahmad and Muslim)

Fathima. Thaha
Psychology and Life Science,
U of T, St George Campus

Sisterhood on Campus

We make a pretty unique looking family - we don't look alike at all – in fact, we're all from different countries. To the uninitiated, we may be considered roommates. However, we must beg to differ. We are sisters.

*

"Can you stop rollerblading around the living room? I can't sleep."

*

We've lived together since September and though many assume we've known each other for a long time, the three of us actually never met face-to-face before deciding to be roommates. After a few long distance three-way phone calls, much e-mail correspondence and discussions about different apartments, we chose a two-bedroom apartment not far from campus. *Alhamdulillah,* with furniture and accessories from our parents' homes, the U of T swap shop, friends' houses, Canadian Tire, Wal-Mart, our superintendent and the sidewalk around the corner, we've managed to put together a decent looking apartment.

*

"I'm going to the Eaton Center." "Can you buy us some chicken?"

*

It's great to have someone to share stories with. Each evening starts with a faithful recollection of the key events of the day. We discuss things that we did, things that we should have done and sometimes things that we're not sure we should have done. Having two other people give input on these issues helps keep things in perspective. It also helps that we come from different backgrounds and life experiences. We can give different perspectives based on these experiences and, *Insha'Allah*, help each other do whatever is best.

After our story-telling session, we usually prepare for dinner. We take turns cooking, although we don't have a fixed schedule. Basically, whoever wants to cook will cook. *Alhamdulillah*, this has worked well for us because our schedules are not always predictable. With each of us coming from a different country, we have a very multicultural cuisine. *Alhamdulillah*, with the help of care packages from moms, aunties and our friends and neighbours, we've never had a problem with food.

*

"You know, I'm practically Desi now. Do I look any darker?"

*

We try to eat dinner together whenever possible. Food just tends to taste better when there are other people around. Thanks to Dollarama, we even have matching sunflower-themed place settings on the dining table, which only enhances our culinary experience.

*

"Guess what was on sale at Dominion?"

*

For the remainder of the evening, we'll usually clean up and study. Although we study different fields, that doesn't stop us from giving our input on each other's work. (Of course, although we try, there are no guarantees on the validity of the input). Our discussions span a wide range of fields from Arabic grammar, to the philosophy of Epicurus, to the ethics of cutting and polishing human bone for histology studies, to African uprisings, and Islam.

We'll also do chores together. One person in particular always makes sure that the whites and colors are separated when doing laundry and won't let anyone else take on this task. We take turns doing dishes, sweeping the floor, making the beds, cleaning the washroom and borrowing the vacuum from a neighbour to vacuum our carpets. Again, we don't have a strict schedule. We each just do whatever we can to get done whatever needs to get done. At the beginning, there was a lot that needed to be done. When we first moved in, the apartment was a disaster zone. The place was a mess. *Alhamdulillah*, after cleaning, polishing, washing the entire floor with Palmolive and placing odor eaters in strategic locations to remove the smell, we have brought the apartment to an acceptable level of live-ability.

*

"I just added another chopstick and bungee cord…that should hold the clothes dryer for a bit"

*

Our day usually ends with us praying *Isha* and *Witr* together. *Alhamdulillah*, we've found a lot of benefits to praying in *jama'*. Besides the 27 times reward that we hope to get *Insha'Allah*, praying in *jama'* also helps us review *surahs* that need reviewing. It keeps our prayers consistent. It's hard to miss a prayer when there are two people waiting for you and expecting you to join them. We also tend to do more *dhikr* and *sunnahs* after the prayer. It's much easier to do these when everyone else is doing it too. You feel kind of embarrassed to leave without praying the *sunnah* when your two roommates are praying it and never seem to miss it.

*

"And where are we going to find this ayah?" "I believe they're all in the Qur'an."

*

We also wake each other up in the morning and pray *fajr* together. We usually set the alarm to go off pretty early in order to give us time to procrastinate in waking up. *Alhamdulillah*, once the procrastination period has lapsed, we all get up and pray together. After *fajr*, we read Qur'an, each of us reading two verses in Arabic until we finish a small section. Then we read the translation. If we're not too

sleepy we'll discuss what we've read; otherwise (more often than not) we go back to sleep.

*

"Wake up, wake up (10 times)....prayer is better than sleep"
"Okay, okay.."

*

One of the benefits of having roommates is the huge wardrobe you end up with. Living with two other sisters basically triples your wardrobe. It's great. We share shirts, *hijabs*, skirts and shoes. It's an especially good arrangement for those of us who are fashion-challenged. Not only do you get nice clothes to choose from, you also have critics who will not let you out of the house wearing clothes that clash, have holes, or haven't been ironed yet. At times, this was more of a pain than a benefit, but *Alhamdulillah*, after a few months the good influence has rubbed off and we all iron our clothes voluntarily. For one unmentioned member of our family, this was a big achievement.

*

"Hey look, I bought us a sweater!"

*

Sisters fight, so the obvious question is - do we fight? Actually, so far, we haven't fought, *Alhamdulillah*. What's the secret? There isn't one; we just try to be generous and respectful with each other. We try to give as much as possible. Giving comes in the form of homework help, making food for each other, making tea, doing each other favors, lending subway tokens, cleaning up, or actually buying each other gifts. The cool thing about giving each other gifts is that, since we live together, we can use the gifts too. When we buy clothes for each other, we're almost buying clothes for ourselves, since we share clothes anyways. It also works with books. Food is also shared so it's not like we're completely altruistic. Fortunately, there are personal gains to be made when doing things for your roommates.

*

"Do you remember our rule?" "Call home if you're going to be out after midnight?"

*

Alhamdulillah, we've all taken benefit from our living arrangement. It's great having sisters.

Sawitri Mardyani
Biomedical Engineering,
PhD Candidate

Fatima Haleem
Bioethics & Health Studies, Year 4
University of Toronto
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Afroza Faruque
History, Year 2
University of Toronto
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The Muslim Identity: a Thing of the past?

Identity. A word so small, yet so powerful. To define one's self is the single-most difficult exercise of self-understanding, as one is left with the arduous examination of the limits and boundaries to which one can individually align. Is identity territorial? Cultural? Ethnic? Religious? Historical?

This is made even more challenging if asked to characterize the *Muslim Identity*. An unpretentious answer would be that it is *being Muslim*. But pick up Thomas Friedman's latest book, *Longitudes and Attitudes,* and this over-simplification of the Muslim identity will not hold a flicker of light to either his generally insightful perception of the Muslim world nor to his prescriptions to our "troubles." Or better yet, follow Samuel Huntington's ever-loyal, and growing, clique of "Middle East experts," who concur with his popularly disseminated conclusion to *Clash of Civilizations*, that "Islam has bloody borders." The past fours years have not only opened a Pandora's box of lies and secrets from the Muslim world for public inspection, but, more importantly, they have put the issue of *Muslim Identity* under relentless scrutiny.

Muslims, for much of the modern age, have been less than forthcoming about both their identities and what it means to be Muslim. Media propagated images have tended to characterize Muslims in a wide array of unattractive portrayals, including polygamous oil sheikhs, oppressed women, fanatical bearded activists, anti-modern, anti-western, and violent populations. Rather than making robust attempts to rectify growing misperceptions, Muslims, for the most part, have responded by drawing even closer to their traditional circles. And so, while thousands of people world-wide protested the war in Iraq, the continued killing of foreigners by Islamist groups has shocked many and made it even more fundamental that Muslims begin to create a strong identity more loyal to our sense of self.

Conversely, the verdict on the *Muslim Identity* is not all that bleak. Two paragons of perseverance and patience have maintained long fights of fighting injustice, while "keeping" their Muslim identities intact. The first is Dr. Saad Edin Ibrahim. Both a prominent professor at the American University of Cairo and a human rights activist, Dr. Ibrahim was arrested on 30 June 2002 for having allegedly broken state law by receiving funds from the European Union without authorization by the State, a charge that was condemned by the EU as being simply untrue. His true crime was the training of election observers for upcoming Egyptian elections. Despite his arduous ordeal, Dr. Ibrahim was released, with the support of the International community, and continues today in his opposition to the unjust laws of the Egyptian government. Confirming his unwavering resolve in his battle for justice is his intention to run as a presidential candidate. Most significant in Dr. Ibrahim's story is his determination to show that Islam is neither unjust nor undemocratic, and that the popular personification of Muslim extremism is not the result of an inherent fault of Islam. His greatest imprint has been to fight for human rights, for democracy, and ultimately for the truth of Islam. He has also impressed upon the world an image of a Muslim who is defiant of the status quo.

Another important figure who is rarely discussed in non-Western circles is Shirine Ebadi. The first Iranian *female* judge, until forced out of her position by the 1979 revolution, Ebadi has spent her life fighting for the rights of children and women in Iran. Bringing to the fore the deep injustices and inequalities experienced by women and children due to lack of democracy, Ebadi was awarded the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize. In her acceptance speech, Ebadi recognized the long struggle ahead with regards to both women and human rights. But more importantly, she emphatically points out that the plight of women and the severe deficiency of human rights in the Muslim world is due to outdated cultures. Moreover, "Islam is a religion whose first sermon to the Prophet begins with the word 'Recite!' The Koran swears by the pen and what it writes. Such a sermon and message cannot be in conflict with awareness, knowledge, wisdom, freedom of opinion and expression and cultural pluralism," asserts Ebadi. Her message invariably attests to the potentials of the Muslim world; however, she also warns that this cannot be done by a simple rejection of those arguments that divide, but rather through the unified work of an international community. She is a noble contemporary example of what Muslim identity could and should be.

Oppressed women, corruption, authoritarian governments, high levels of insurgency, terrorism, oil sheikhs, tribal fiefdoms, ignorance, illiteracy, and religious intolerance are just some of the common terms used to describe Muslims. Very rarely is there discussion on the things that make up the true Muslim identity: peace, acceptance, justice, and, most importantly, a unique mixture of various nations (with differing cultures and traditions) sharing a single language and a single religion. As we all end this year, going out on our different journeys, it is important to remember that part of being Muslim is creating the identity that complements our faith.

Angie Balata
Year 4, Political Science
University of Toronto

Working Together for Tsunami Relief

Over the past few months we have witnessed through images and stories in the media how indiscriminate and powerful the force of nature can be, as well as the utter vulnerability of humans. We have seen tremendous suffering, a horrific sense of loss and the constant struggle hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – are living on a daily basis in the wake of the Tsunami disaster.

However, as everything that happens in this world goes according to Allah's (Glory be to Him) will and plan, there have been some positives that have endured as a result of this truly global tragedy. What is most striking about this latest disaster is the outpouring of cooperation, generosity and togetherness we've seen from all corners of the globe. By the Grace of Allah (Glory be to Him), this natural calamity has brought people together, cutting across racial divisions, religious divides, and ethnic animosities.

As a result, talks of mediation between Tamils and Singalese have finally begun, commencing important strides to help resolve the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The indigenous population of Banda Aceh has been granted partial autonomy by the Indonesian government as a measure of goodwill in the face of this tragedy. It is only a shame that it took the largest tragedy in human history in terms of lives lost for this to happen.

Perhaps the most enduring scene I witnessed was on television where a group of Buddhist university students from Sri Lanka were working hand in hand with Muslims – two religious groups that have historically not gotten along in that country - searching through the wreckage of a Muslim School that was practically destroyed.

Indeed, we have realized that a global natural disaster does not discriminate; it does not know if it is attacking a Scandinavian tourist or a local Thai monk, if it is hitting a Tamil or a Singalese, or if it is striking a Hindu or a Muslim. After all, we are all - whether rich or poor, brown or yellow, politically left-wing or right-wing - creations of Allah (Glory be to Him) and made from the same material. Truly, the world has come together in its united display of sympathy and support. Let us only hope this level of generosity and cooperation does not subside when the Tsunami is no longer featured on the front pages and begins to be addressed in the past tense.

What's more, the sheer quantity of global donations and support cannot be overlooked. The Red Cross, based in Switzerland, reported total donations at over $1.1 billion. Meanwhile, UNICEF, a subsidiary of the United Nations, more than doubled its appeal of $144 million and has raised over $350 Billion – *Alhamdullilah*!

Locally, both in the GTA in general and the U of T community in particular, Muslim organizations such as ICNA-Relief and student clubs such as KIDS (Kids in Developing Societies), SWJ (Students for World Justice) and the MSA have been very active. The organization with which I personally have been directly involved, the ECF (Everybody Cares Foundation), ran a month-long Fundraising Drive culminating with a banquet dinner on January 30th, with a goal of raising $25,000 through UNICEF Canada *Insha'Allah*. The level of support and help we've received over the past few weeks has been phenomenal to say the least, including assistance from radio and television outlets, Consul-Generals from the countries affected and the religious community at large representing six different faiths.

It is in times like these that we see the true power of humanity. It also reflects the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). For it is he is who once said:

"Each person's every joint must perform a charity every day the sun comes up : to act justly between two people is a charity; to help a man with his mount, lifting him onto it or hoisting up his belongings onto it is a charity: a good word is a charity, every step you take to prayers is a charity and removing a harmful thing from the road is a charity."

(Related by Bukhari and Muslim)

Azim W. Ahmed
Year 3
International Relations
Co-Founder of the Everybody Cares Foundation
(www.everybodycares.ca).

Our Lord! Let not our hearts deviate from the truth after You have guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from Your grace. Verily you are the Giver of bounties without measure.

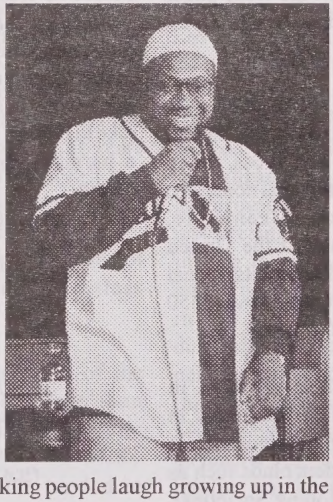
(Quran, 3:8)

ONE ON ONE WITH PREACHER MOSS

'Muslim comedy' was a term that was virtually unheard of a few years ago and has now become one of the most discussed topics among Muslims. Some consider there to be no place for humour in Islam, while others think of it as a new tool for *Da'wah*. Moreover, many simply consider it a means for social events where Muslims can chill out and share a laugh.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Shamsideen Malik Abdul Al-Ghaffar, a big name on the Muslim stand-up comedy scene. Haven't heard of him? You may know him better as **Preacher Moss**! He is based in Washington D.C. and is the chief designer and business development manager for the "Allah Made Me Funny" tour, which had a successful run around North America last year. He has been a comedian for over 20 years, and a Muslim for over 18 years, making him one of the first contemporary Muslim comedians of note.

The following are excerpts of the interview:



- At what age did you think you could become a stand- up comedian?

I thought I could be funny in my early years. I had the pleasure of watching and listening to people like Bill Cosby, Jackie "Moms" Mabley, Pigmeat Markham, and a bevy of other comedians as a youth. I was influenced to try my hand at intentionally making people laugh growing up in the Baptist church I attended with my family. I made parodies of things that happened in the neighbourhood, at school, and at church. Soon I found a basic level of proficiency. Being a smart-aleck didn't hurt either. I seriously thought about being a professional comedian during my junior year of high school. It was an idea I pursued straight out of high school until now.

- How did your family take your decision to become a comedian?

My family supported the idea, but it took some time for them because I was young at the time. I was hitting stages when I was 17 years old. The promise I made to my family was that I would graduate college. After that I was free to pursue my goals.

- Could you please tell me a few words about your educational/ professional life prior to becoming a comedian?

I graduated with a major in Broadcast Journalism, and a minor in Film from Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI. I have been in the community service sector since I graduated. I was a teacher for 12 years, and also spent time in the ranks as an Outreach Worker, Director of Youth Programs at a community centre, and a Juvenile Corrections employee.

- Who are your role models?

My role models are Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), my parents, Malcolm X, Dick Gregory, and an old school brother from Baltimore, MD named "Pope."

- Do you think comedy is an effective *Da'wah* tool for Muslims?

I think comedy is an effective tool for Muslims in that we are so passionate about our *deen*, but we haven't learned to parlay it through different mediums. Humour is an expression of life, and Islam is a management system of individual and community life. Humour is disarming and like the spread of Islam, it takes on the surroundings it enters. Insha'Allah (If God wills), the idea is to improve the world community, and only Allah (Glory be to Him) is the best Judge.

- Could you tell me about the Muslim comedy scene as a whole? When did it start? Due to recent times, its awareness has peaked but I'm sure this has been around for some time.

Muslim comedy started during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him). It is reflected in writings and the *sunnah*. We hear stories of how beautiful his smile was and the effect of his cheerful demeanour on people. The "Muslim" comedy scene today has a lot of issues facing it. One of them is that there are very few true Muslim comedians. The other is that the idea of entertainment is new to the Muslim community so we haven't realized its value. Making friends laugh does not make one a comedian. There is a long process to becoming a "good" comedian, just like being a "good" Muslim. When it comes to Muslim comedy, the Muslim community, in many cases, has been cheated around the world because they didn't understand or value the process. Muslim comedy should be

able to shed light on the beauty of our community, and Muslim comedians, who struggle and sacrifice for the sake of Allah (Glory be to Him), should be embraced and recognized as effective tools for changing the Muslim and non-Muslim environments alike.

- Do you think there is a difference between 'Muslim comedy' and 'Muslims who are comedians'? Apart from a few of the Muslim comedians, many Muslim artists are simply trying to be funny, and in the process using 'un-Islamic' subject matte, vulgarity and profanity.

Of course there is a difference. I find that the Muslim community is an intelligent one and that our brothers and sisters let us know that there is a difference. I would say that if you don't hear the words "Allah Made Me Funny" or some association to it, there is a chance that you won't be getting what you really wanted in terms of Muslim comedians. I can't speak to the intent of someone expressing him/herself. I would say that Allah (Glory be to Him) knows best, and to leave it at that.

- Can you tell us some details about the 'Allah Made Me Funny' (AMMF) comedy tour that you organized?

"Allah Made Me Funny" is a collective of what I feel are the elite of Muslim comedians in the world. Our approach is to reach out to worldwide communities, while maintaining the clear characteristics of "God consciousness." I believe that separates us from a lot of people – we set out to make change, not huge fortunes. We came off our comfort zones and sacrificed for the sake of Allah (Glory be to Him), and his believers and non-believers. Azhar Usman, Azeem and myself have set aside our pride, egos, and ambitions to serve and defend this *deen*. It is a comedy Mecca – we have come together to be servants at every level of our success or failure. As we look into the faces of our audience and see different cultures and backgrounds, we see that Allah (Glory be to Him) has planned on bringing us all together. We are blessed to be a part of that.

- The various shows that Muslim comedians, such as yourself, have done have become very popular. How do you feel about that?

I don't make assessments of our popularity. It is my job to be focused on improving our community. One of the highlights of the tour was sponsoring a basketball camp where not only kids could enjoy themselves, but we could be a part of their success more than ours. The fact that we not only sponsored the camp but also ran it and interacted with the future of our community was one of the most important things we've done. That is what we are here for.

Preacher Moss with Azeem & Azhar Usman

- In what ways do you think comedy can bring a Muslim closer to God? Also, can it bring Muslims closer to each other?

I can see where it has brought some people closer to Allah (Glory be to Him), and it can definitely bring Muslims together. We have an international audience, and the beauty of this religion [ascends] to many levels, whereby Allah (Glory be to Him) can affect us in a variety of ways. I see crowds of people who would normally never see or associate with one another. However, when the show starts, the name of Allah (Glory be to Him) pulls them together and they look forward to being with other Muslims, Alhamdullilah (Praise be to God).

- How do you come up with your jokes? Do you screen them prior to performances?

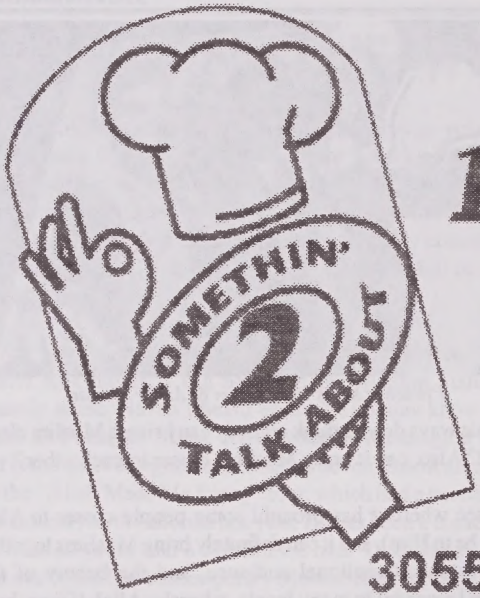
I am a writer by nature, so my material reflects constant observation. I don't necessarily screen my material, as much as I screen my intent for performing. I understand what makes people laugh, but I am more focused on what makes us grow and empowered, which I then weave into my humour.

- Do you think making jokes about Muslim stereotypes, such as terrorism, is just too overdone? Is that not the same as making fun of the way someone dresses, their accent, country, etc.? Is it not time that Muslim comedians went beyond that?

Yes, I think it is overdone. You have to have a specific point of view that has merits wherever you go. If I wanted to talk about racism, I would go to the racist society, and not preach to the converted. Our comedy has to be respected unilaterally – not accepted, but respected. I am not a passive comedian. We are supposed to be the best of the best, and carry ourselves to situations to educate and enlighten wherever we go. It has always been my goal to challenge the environment to improve.

- Are you working on any other ventures?

Continued on page 21



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A Journey to Islam

When I was asked to write an article about my journey to Islam, I did not know where to start. It is so hard to take all the experiences that led up to changing my religion and to sum them up in a few paragraphs.

If I look back at myself two years ago, I feel that I would not even recognize myself. Since I have become a Muslim my life and faith have grown and changed in many ways. The one thing that does not change is my belief in One God. Monotheism was the most pivotal drawing point in my decision to becoming a Muslim. I was raised a Catholic; I went to Church and Sunday school. Even when I was young I had heard that the Bible had been changed and I always felt that what I was reading was perhaps one person's opinion and not a divine teaching. My Catholic teachers always seemed to have complicated answers to my most simple questions. With my Catholic faith the connection to God felt cut out, meaning, you prayed through the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him), or even went to a Priest for forgiveness. I was taught that Priests were closer to God than ordinary people like me so we needed to go to them to reach God for forgiveness. Why couldn't I just pray directly to God, if God is really the most powerful? When it came to matters of the heart and talking to God, it was so complicated. I always wished it could be simpler, straightforward and reasonable.

As an adult, when I had come across Muslims who could answer my questions regarding Islam, God was blessing those people by giving them the guidance to give me clear information about Islam. I was told about the basics of Islam first, the *Shahada* (declaration of faith). If you believe in that, then you are a Muslim. The line of prophets from Abraham to Muhammad (peace be upon them) were taught through Islam as they are supposed to be. The Prophets (peace be upon them), quite simply, were humans with a divine message from God. As a Muslim you are supposed to worship nothing besides the Creator – simple, plain, easy to understand AND BELIEVE. Our faith as Muslims is the most beautiful and rational connection to God. Even when I meet new Muslims, I am very compelled to stick to those basic reasons why I, myself, chose Islam.

The second most important thing is family – one of the most important things I have learned since becoming a Muslim. Everyone has a different family no matter where they are from or how "normal" they think their family is. Every one has its quirks and differences. The reason why I say that is because it is your family that makes you who you are. Perhaps if I was not so sure that my family would stick by me, I would not have become a Muslim. God only knows. As most converts deal with their families disowning them, or at least giving them a very hard time, mine was relatively easy to walk through the reformation of my life and religion with.

To label it, my family is Irish Catholic. When most people hear that I can see their eyes pop out of their heads - "You're kidding! And they still let you in the house?"

I laugh because if it were ten or fifteen years ago, they may NOT have let me in the house. I try to think what it is over these years that softened them to accept my decision, that earlier was "taboo." Perhaps it is their fear of losing their "favourite" daughter (just joking about the favourite part; I have two other sisters they love just as much). Even when I came home with the *Hijab* on, I got raised eyebrows from my father and nothing else. Not even silent disapproval, just a look - "Ok, this is different, but we will deal with it."

After I had been a Muslim for about half a year, I brought home my soon to-be-husband for my parents' approval. Before he came, I made sure to tell my parents a little about him – where he was from and what he did for a living. Since he was from Egypt and my mother had absolutely no experience with anyone from overseas, she had a few funny questions about turbans and camels, which I took in stride and had a chuckle with! Once I had answered all the questions she had, she was excited to be a part of my marriage decision. On their acceptance of him I could see that my parents were more blessed people than I ever knew.

The family I grew up in, with its typical prejudices and western thoughts, were ready to take me, my new life and new husband. They really looked at him with a clear mind and said, "He's a good man; we could see it from the minute he walked in the door." And that was it, decision made. Their approval meant the world to me and I knew I could go on with my life and move ahead as a Muslim in this world. I knew that my parents' love and support during such a transition in my life was a gift from God alone.

When I have a faith tug-of-war in my heart, I always think about how God has blessed me with my wonderful family. Everyone has their own set of blessings in life; they just need to spend time recognizing and appreciating what they are. Some people are so successful with money, jobs, education and friends that they may have an easier time dealing with some aspects of their lives and a harder time dealing with others. In my case, when I became a Muslim God helped me to keep my parents close to me.

Your sister in Islam,
Suzanne McManus

Cultural Essence in Islam

Culture, as defined from an anthropological perspective is "the learned behaviours, beliefs, customs and systems that are shared by a particular group; it is the primary means by which humans adapt to their environments and thus defines the way of life that is characteristic of a particular society." (Nanda & Warms, 2002:420) Under these specificities, Islam is capable of fitting into the classifications of a culture, for all Muslims share a common belief and worship in the One God and this shapes their world outlook. All Muslims follow specific rules of conduct as outlined in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*; and all share a common language to a certain degree, whereby they try to learn Arabic to understand the true meaning of the Qur'an. However, the *deen* of Islam is more than a mere culture. It is an *entire* way of life. It extends the boundaries of culture because it is not only the learned aspects of one's life, but it also encompasses a natural inclination, an internal *fitrah* of humans to succumb to the Will of Allah (Glory be to Him).

Thus, it can be said that the 1.48 billion Muslims worldwide who follow Islam share a 'common' culture, but that is not their *only* culture, for Islam does not negate nor discourage the value of foreign cultures. To be blessed to live in a multicultural society such as Toronto, it surely allows us as citizens to know and appreciate many different ways of life, languages, arts and (most importantly) food. As the Italian linguist, Antonio Gramsci, once commented, the more languages and cultures one knows, the more outlooks on life he/she attains. Each culture's members have a unique way of understanding the world around them that is shaped by its unique geographical, social, and economic status. These understandings are expressed through customs, languages, arts and food.

Allah (Glory be to Him) is the One who created everything in His infinite Wisdom. If He willed, He could have made us all into one single people. Rather, the Qur'an explicitly states:

O mankind! We created you from a (single pair of a) male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).

[Qur'an, 49:13]

As part of a Muslim's continuous quest to seek knowledge, we are in fact urged to know and appreciate different cultures. In spite of the individual beauty of each culture, as Muslims we must remember that there is no discrimination in culture and the most honoured and elevated amongst peoples are those who are most pious. In his last sermon to his people, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said that "All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white - except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood." Our mutual differences are not meant to create divisions amongst us; rather they should act as a means of understanding one another and allow for further cohesion amongst one another.

A Muslim's ultimate attachment is with his/her Creator - God. Thus, if cultural differences are meant to act as a means of brotherhood and cohesion and not division, then it certainly cannot act as a means of division from our attachment to God. As Muslims, our first allegiance is to God and Islam - all other things carefully take shape and fall into place with respect to our Islamic morals and principals. The need to unravel a purpose to reality is the driving force of *human culture*, the system of meanings that reflect how we give expression to this need (Danesi, 2004:85) As Muslims, our purpose has already been 'unraveled' through Islam - to solely worship God:

"I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve Me. No Sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me. For Allah is He Who gives (all) Sustenance,- Lord of Power,- Steadfast (for ever)."

[Qur'an, 51:56-58]

Therefore, our cultural awareness should be utilized to strengthen our purpose as Muslims. Simultaneously, our Islamic awareness should allow us to discern between acceptable and unacceptable cultural practices.

A historical look at the accomplishments of Muslims in Baghdad during the 9th and 10th centuries proves it to be one of the most fruitful periods for Muslims with respect to research and scholarship, economic prosperity and political influence. This period in Baghdad and other parts of the Muslim world is also characterized by a great cultural blend of scholars and leaders from the East, South Asia, Middle East and some parts of Europe. *Al-Kindi*, a scholar in *Kufah* - one of the leading centers for culture and learning during the 9th century, was quoted to have said, "We must not be ashamed of deeming

truth good and of acquiring truth from wherever it comes, even if it comes from races remote from us and nations different from us" (Hehmeyer, 2005). This was the attitude of the scholars during this time. Differences created a rich culture and truth was sought, and thus it acted as the overarching binding agent.

As Muslims in Toronto today, we too are blessed to be amongst a unique cultural blend and within a great academic atmosphere at U of T. By implementing our academic learning and gaining an understanding of Islamic principals, nurturing an appreciation for our cultural diversities and looking to our past for inspiration we can create a strong brotherhood amongst one another to move forward in unity, *Insha'Allah.*

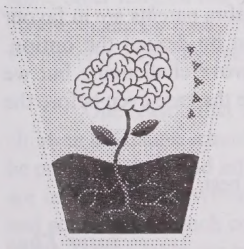
Memona Hossain

David Suzuki Continued from page 10

David concluded the evening by offering the "Nature Challenge." The challenge is to choose three from a list of ten things that researchers have concluded are the most effective ways individuals can positively impact the environment.

The Nature Challenge

1. Reduce home energy use by 10%.
2. Choose energy-efficient homes & appliances.
3. Don't use pesticides.
4. Eat meat-free meals one day a week.
5. Buy locally grown and produced food.
6. Choose a fuel-efficient vehicle.
7. Walk, bike, carpool or take transit.
8. Choose a home close to work or school.
9. Support alternative transportation.
10. Learn more and share with others.



For details on the Nature Challenge, visit http://www.davidsuzuki.org/WOL/Challenge/10steps.asp

Mohammad Elbagoury
Alumni, 0T4, Electrical Engineering
University of Toronto

1 on 1 with Preacher Moss Continued from page 17

My current venture is to develop a sitcom based on a Muslim family or character in the U.S., and to make film scripts based on that. My other project is an educational initiative for minority leadership development at the college prep and college level. It is a private-public partnership. So any Muslims wishing to go to college…holla at you, boy!

- I'm sure there are people interested in pursuing comedy as a career. Do you have any advice for them? (I hope I don't disappoint any parents who only want their kids to be doctors or engineers!)

My advice to those with comedy aspirations is simple. Be sincere with God, your family, and yourself. Be disciplined in expressing yourself, and understand that your skills or lack of skills as a comic is a blessing. Beside that, my advice is three things…write, write, and write some more.

- Where does Preacher Moss go from here?

My direct plans for the future are to keep promoting the tour and helping our *ummah.* The immediate goals for the tour are a full-length concert movie of the tour to be shot late this year or early next year. It will be a huge challenge, but our *ummah* is worth it.

- When will we be seeing you in Canada again?

We are planning a full tour show for Toronto in late April or early May. Due to the response of our last time there, we want to make sure to take the time to make the shows special for our T.O. brothers and sisters. The support of Toronto Muslims has been tremendous to the tour and we only want to give them the best the tour has to offer. We are looking forward to returning. Just keep checking www.allahmademefunny.com for tour updates.
(You heard it here first folks, the 'Allah Made Me Funny' tour is coming to Toronto in April/May!)

- Any words of wisdom to leave us with?

1. Always acknowledge the greatness of Allah (Glory be to Him).
2. Be yourself, because you don't see anyone else doing it.

I would like to thank Preacher Moss for taking time out from his busy schedule for the interview – *Jazak Allahu Khairan.*

Dr. Farhan M. Asrar

OPINIONS & ANALYSES

Islamic Schools or...

All of us are in a continuous struggle living in a secular world trying to meet Islamic ideals. As a community, we aim to be positively contributing citizens while fulfilling our religious obligations; we seek the balance between integration and the challenges integration engenders. This struggle is epitomized in the debate over Islamic schools vs. public schools.

Certain problems in the public school system are apparent to the majority of observers. For example, public schools have been unable to check the problem of drug proliferation through campuses. Coupled with high peer pressure, many naïve children submit to a lifestyle that causes them physical harm and can aggravate into anti-social behavior.

Faith-based communities, particularly the Muslims, have some additional concerns. Public schools have done very little to reign in and discourage frivolous sexual behavior of teenaged pupils. The youth are not held accountable for their actions and no effort is expended to discipline them. In some sense, youth are expected to be rebellious and anti-authoritative and so their excesses are ignored. This is hardly a manner in which to raise responsible citizens.

Over the past couple of months, Muslim parents have expressed concern at compulsory sex education classes in public schools. Here, children are taught not only to be tolerant of people of all sexual orientations but to respect sexual diversity. This is in direct contradiction to their religious beliefs and the parents are justified in being concerned about this undermining of their children's belief.

Peer pressure to conform to teenage fashion is another issue. Considering the emphasis that Islam places on modesty, it is most appropriate for children to be raised in an environment that encourages this virtue.

North American parents have reacted to these problems in several ways. The majority are resigned to the fact that there are no viable alternatives. However, not everybody is content with this approach; some parents have teamed up and created action groups that try to influence school boards and school policies. Simultaneously, religious academies offering after-school activities for children to supplement their instruction at school have gained in popularity. Still, other parents have taken it upon themselves to tutor their own children, becoming part of a growing movement of home-schooling networks. Finally, the need for 'Islamic Schools' has been registered by the Muslim community.

Institutionalized modern-day schools did not exist during the time of the Prophet (Peace be upon him). The Companions (May Allah be pleased with them) were educated by the example and teachings of the Prophet (Peace be upon him), which were never just limited to the *mosque* or any other building compound. Keep in mind also that during the early Meccan years, the Muslims were surrounded by a hostile idolatrous society. This makes one ask: what is so 'Islamic' about 'Islamic Schools' when such institutions did not exist at the time of the Prophet (Peace be upon him)? Modern Islamic schools are attempts at restructuring the contemporary school unit to bring it in conformity with Islamic values. Islamic schools attempt to provide an environment where practicing Islamic values is the norm and not the exception. They differ from traditional school not so much in what they teach but why they teach it. The paradigm they champion does not identify separate spheres of religious and secular knowledge. All knowledge is sought with the ultimate aim of appreciating Allah's creation and His wisdom and to benefit fellow creatures.

The idea of Islamic schools has spawned fears that such schools would breed extremists and intolerant Muslim youth unable and unwilling to connect with the larger society. Yet by scrutinizing the stated objectives of these institutions, we can ensure that they encourage positive engagement with the society in areas that their religious values permit. Also, bear in mind that state schools are no guarantee against polarization and confrontation in societies. Looking back at the race riots in England, in the summer of 2001, we see that the participants involved were actually state schooled youth. Similarly, there is growing concern over isolationist and extremist tendencies amongst immigrant Muslim youth in France. A brief study reveals that in both cases the underlying reasons for the disenchantment have been the long-standing sense of injustice and discrimination amongst a segment of the population.

Parents should have the choice to raise their children in a manner that they see fitting. Since at present there is an indication that large numbers of Muslim parents are in favour of Islamic school, they should not be denied the option. Implementing Islamic ideals may prove challenging but we cannot let spurious arguments decide the case even before the schools are put into service.

And Allah (Glory be to Him) knows best.

Yaser Khan
Nanoengineering, Year 3
University of Toronto (St. George)

Public Schools? That is the Question...

One of the main arguments in favour of Islamic schools is that they give young Muslims an Islamic education and provide them with the Islamic background they need to live as good, productive citizens in our Canadian society. I must respectfully disagree. Public schools prepare young people to live in this society better than Islamic schools. There are a number of reasons for this.

In public schools a student comes across many different kinds of people and is exposed to different ideas and opinions. I consider my experience in public schools invaluable. I have a broader picture of the world because I met different people with different philosophies about life and the world. I had friends who were everything from Catholic to atheist. I began to understand the differences that are inherent among people. Many discussions and debates with them got me to better appreciate where these people were coming from and why they thought the way they did. Canadian society is diverse and this was an excellent opportunity to experience that diversity and to be better prepared in dealing with it in my adult life. I also began to appreciate Islam more. In fact, I don't think that one can truly appreciate Islam without being exposed to the different ideologies out there. You begin to value Islam more and are grateful to Allah (Glory be to Him) that he made you a Muslim.

By listening to different ideas you begin to ask more questions about your own faith. As such, you gain more knowledge about Islam and become more familiar with it at a deeper level. Islam means more to Muslims in Canada than in other countries. I have heard that in many Muslim countries Islam is just a ritual that people go through every day. They take it for granted. Some people just go to the *masjid* because everyone else does, otherwise they frankly couldn't care less. It is true that we have some problems in Canada. It is also true, however, that we value Islam more here precisely because we live in a non-Muslim society. We are conscious Muslims here in Canada. We can easily follow some other religion but we make the conscious decision to choose Islam. By being intellectually tested again and again we are only strengthened. We have nothing to fear.

One reason that some parents choose to send their children to Islamic school is that they want their children to be protected from bad influences. In an Islamic school they are in an Islamic environment with an Islamic dress code and so on. While such concerns are completely legitimate and understandable, we must take a few things into account. Society is full of bad influences. Hiding our children from them isn't the right approach. Teaching our children to deal with them is. If we shelter our children all their lives they'll have a hard time adjusting to society when they grow up. They will face many challenges and will suffer more than they have to simply because they were never exposed to society's challenges before. After all, there is nothing like experience. Children should go to public school and learn Islamic morals at home, at the *masjid*, and at Sunday school. This way, children are exposed to the real world and receive guidance in how to deal with it at the same time. I know Muslims who have grown up in the public school system but are still committed to their faith. In fact, they are better able to handle the challenges of society than those who grew up sheltered.

I know that the atmosphere in public schools today is increasingly problematic. Many fear that the young are very impressionable, and this is true. So why not impress them with Islam? Parents should take an active part in the intellectual development of their children. If parents did this and encouraged their children to have some Muslim friends, take part in the school MSA, and participate in Islamic activities these children would have a sense of identity as Muslims and will gain valuable experience in dealing with other people. They get the best of both worlds.

Having a broad mind is very important, and the open atmosphere of public schools allows people to think outside the box. It is people with these minds who can help us communicate more effectively with Canadian society. Let's not forget that we belong to Canadian society and that we must play a part in it. We can achieve nothing productive by hiding in our mosques and Islamic schools. We need to be out there. One reason we are looked upon with suspicion is because we immigrate to this country in large numbers and then go hide in our mosques. If we want Canadians to understand Islam and us, we need to be involved in mainstream society. We are Canadian Muslims and as such we should be part of the Canadian public school system. That way, non-Muslim students in high school can be exposed to Islam as well. We need to do a more effective job of engaging ordinary Canadians. Those with a public school education are best suited for this. They understand Canadians better, having grown up with them; they understand Canadian culture better, having been exposed to Canadian language and all its idioms; and they know what being Canadian is all about.

Fahad Kamal
Year 2, NMC
University of Toronto (St. George)

Challenges Facing Muslim Unity

There are two groups of politically aware Muslims. One group watches the news on television, reads the news in leading papers, and even reads political books by leading media analysts and commentators such as Noam Chomsky and John Pilger. Yet, despite having this wealth of knowledge, this group of Muslims always comes to the same conclusion. They believe the root cause for the misery and misfortunes of the Muslims today is the actions of the United States, Israel and any other Western or even Muslim nation that is allied with the West. This group of people feels that every action that Muslims do, whether it is good or bad, can be directly related to a Western power which is out to destroy the Muslims, and usurp the oil and wealth they own. They believe that every terrorist act blamed on Muslims is actually being done by the Americans, is a set-up by the Israelis, or is just a ploy to further tarnish the image of Islam.

The other group of Muslims is one, which reads the same news, watches the same documentaries and reads the same books, but comes to a slightly different conclusion. They are critical of the US policies towards Israel, strongly oppose the war in Iraq, and are fearful of the spread of American imperialism. Yet, this group of Muslims is also critical of the atrocities perpetrated by Muslims. They are critical of those that ruthlessly kill women and children in the name of Islam. They are critical of those that aim to destroy the peace and tranquility of their homelands. They are critical of those Muslims that wage war to create divisions and *fitna* in the *Ummah*.

These two politically driven intellectual groups for the most part can co-exist peacefully. It is only at times when they are forced to interact and engage in debate or when they are faced with the challenge of explaining the actions of Muslims around the world, such as why Iraqis would behead members of humanitarian relief agencies, that they feel challenged, or even threatened.

The members in the first group (Group A) often find that their political judgments are clouded by their emotions. By the time they get their point out, they have criticized all Americans, Westerners and have yelled at their 'opponents'. Their points, which are often valid, are usually missed, as emotions override their argument. The members of this group are well intentioned, but lack the debating skills to calmly argue their points in a public spectrum. Unfortunately, members of this group often take the liberty to be representatives and spokespeople for all Muslims, and as a result, the notion that Muslims cannot engage in meaningful and intellectual debate is applied to all.

Members of the second group (Group B) are a little better off in that they are more reserved with their emotions. However, by the same token, they have a habit of washing the Muslim laundry out in public. They fail to realize that bringing out all the vices of the Muslims in public, especially in a non-Muslim environment, shows disunity within the community. Moreover, it confuses non-Muslims, as they fail to realize that the problems we have as a community are because of individual misinterpretations and not a reflection of the religion as a whole.

I created these groups based on observations I made in the latest Islam-sensitive issue in Ontario – the debate on Islamic-arbitration in Canadian courts, but I have seen them applicable to many different settings. The debate over whether to allow Islamic based arbitration in Ontario has been raging for months, and the media hype surrounding it has been spurred on by both fears that a similarly extremist implementation of the laws which was found in Afghanistan could be implemented here, and the division and debate within the Muslim community in Ontario.

I remember watching *Counterspin* on CBC, when they had five Muslim panelists debating about *Shariah*. Two of the panelists were against it, and three were talking in favor of it. Out of the three in favor, one of the men was definitely from group A. He was emotional, forceful and unable to see the points made by the other side. Instead of convincing the audience and his opponents of why *Shariah* should be in the courts, he told them that if a Muslim did not accept and follow *Shariah*, he/she was not a good Muslim. He let his emotions run his argument. And this led his position to be weakened. Moreover, he personally started attacking his opponent's characters and virtues. The end result was that people watching saw this man as an over-emotional and extreme spokesperson for *Shariah*, who they felt would advocate a hard-line implementation of a law that they already had doubts about.

On the other hand, proponents of group B have further deepened the divide in the Muslim community in Ontario. Instead of attempting to engage in meaningful and progressive debates within the community, they have gone to the Western media to plead their case. Women's groups and progressive Muslim groups have started 'crying wolf' even before Marilyn Boyd assessed the case for Islamic arbitration. Muslims who have been fighting against it have turned a blind eye to years of other faith-based arbitration in Ontario and years of closed Islamic-arbitration which has been going on in *masjids* and Islamic centers. While their fears are undoubtedly justified based on the misinterpretation and misuse of Shariah worldwide, they have failed to see that this may be an opportunity to create a

Continued on page 32

Educating Muslims About International Development

Following the theme of this issue, 'The Muslim Identity,' and in light of current news issues, I was extremely motivated to write this article. International development, or human development, is a topic that is close to my heart. The issue is not about involvement as much as it is about awareness and understanding the bigger picture.

Let me throw some questions at you. How many people live on less than a dollar a day? How much is America's annual military expenditure? I started off by conducting an online poll with the question: How many of you know at least 4 of the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)? The results: 91% do not know any. And 9% of them know less than four. I know I can safely extend these figures to the larger Muslim community on campus and perhaps outside of it as well. I have tried to divide up this article into sections that would come together and make you see the bigger picture. So, let's start!

What is human development?

Human development is not just about the rise or fall of national incomes, but also about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. People are the real wealth of nations. Development is thus about expanding the choices people have to lead lives that they value. Therefore, it is about much more than economic growth, which is only a means — if a very important one — of enlarging people's choices and building human capabilities. It is not merely the accumulation of wealth. As Aristotle said in ancient Greece, "*Wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking, for it is merely useful for the sake of something else.*" The ultimate goal is human freedom. [1]

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Fact Sheet

- 3,000,000,000 people live on less than $2.00 per day.
- 900,000,000 people live on less than $1.00 per day.
- 1,200,000,000 people don't have access to safe drinking water.
- 2,400,000,000 people don't have access to sanitation.
- 800,000,000 people go hungry each day.
- 150,000,000 of these are school children
- 1 in 16 have a chance of dying in child birth.
- 45,000,000 adults live with HIV / AIDS (95% in developing countries)
- 5,000,000 children live with HIV/AIDS
- 3,000,000 children die per year due to waterborne disease.

In September 2000, 147 heads of State and Government and 189 nations in total, in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, committed themselves to making development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want. They acknowledged that progress is based on sustainable economic growth, which must focus on the poor, with human rights at the centre. The Declaration calls for halving the number of people who live on less than one dollar a day, by the year 2015 This effort also involves finding solutions to hunger, malnutrition and disease, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, guaranteeing a basic education for everyone and supporting sustainable development. Direct support from the richer countries, in the form of aid, trade, debt relief and investment, is to be provided to help developing countries. [2]

In a nutshell, the eight Millennium Development Goals emanating from the Millennium Declaration are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and the empowerment of women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Subhan'Allah (Glory be to God)! If all this can be achieved by 2015, wouldn't this mean that the world would be living by the rules of Islam? No citizen of an Islamic state should die of hunger if everyone pays their *Zakat* and makes sure it is distributed justly - this was the rule during the time of Umar (May Allah be pleased with him).

O you who believe, stand out firmly for justice as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it concerns rich or poor, for God can best protect both.

[Quran 4:135]

The costs of achieving these goals are completely affordable. The world's military budget is $900 billion a year, whereas the costs of MDGs are $135 billion for 2006, rising to $195 billion by 2015 - a sad comparison.

Point Seven Pledge - vision of Canadians

"The Point Seven Pledge is a Made-in-Canada campaign to show our politicians that there is widespread support for Canada to take the lead and to play our part in helping to reduce poverty around the world. We are coalescing around the goal of meeting our 40 year-old promise to increase aid to 0.7% of GDP." [3]

In 1969, former Prime Minister and Canadian Nobel Laureate Lester B. Pearson was asked to chair a

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Working for the MSA: the Path of no Return

And strive in God's cause with all the striving that is due to Him. He has chosen you, and has laid no hardships on you in religion...

[Qur'an, 22:78]

Working for the MSA is a heck of a job. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise. Like all new endeavours we vow to fulfill, it has the initial stage of euphoria that comes with treading uncharted territories. But all too soon, the work can turn into yet another deadline that needs to be met; yet another hurriedly drafted email to send; or yet another folder to add to your already oh-so-heavy backpack. Devoid of effort and enthusiasm, it becomes just another burden on your shoulders. And that initial gratefulness and pride at the realization that Allah (Glory be to Him) has chosen you to be among those that continue to carry the torch of Islam, simply fades away into the foggy mists of commitments and priorities.

And yet, after all this, your hearts hardened and became like rocks, or even harder.

[Qur'an, 2:74]

It was not until I found myself dreading the arrival of future events, that I realized something was wrong. If I started out with the intention that my work was solely for the sake of Allah (Glory be to Him), then why was there this disinterest and disillusionment? Where had I stumbled and what was it that I had lost?

To each is a goal to which Allah turns him: So strive together as in a race towards all that is good.

[Qur'an, 2:148]

I soon realized that I had fallen into a trap. I thought that I was doing all that I possibly could to guarantee myself the pleasure of Allah (Glory be to Him). MSA was just the icing on the cake - my ticket to *Jannah*. But somewhere down that road, my means merged into and became my end. I worked not for the sake of pleasing Allah (Glory be to Him) but for the sake of simply fulfilling the responsibilities I had been so foolishly eager to take on. When planning a social gathering for Eid, for instance, it is easy to lose one's self in the minor glitches that are bound to occur and lose focus of the larger objective. The goal of the event changes from providing Muslims with the opportunity to celebrate a blessed occasion, into planning a successful event with sufficient advertising to attract a good number of people. And the measure of success or failure changes from analyzing whether the objectives outlined were achieved, into whether everyone present was enjoying themselves or whether the number of 'new' non-familiar MSA members that showed up for this event surpassed the numbers that turned up at the last one.

So give the good news to My servants who listen to the word, then follow the beauty in it. Such are they whom God has guided. And such are they who are endowed with understanding.

[Qur'an, 39:17-18]

Having discovered the nature of the problem I was faced with, I now had the daunting task of leaping over the hurdles that I had created for myself. But how would I accomplish this task? I honestly wished I had an answer, but the truth is that I do not. For it is a personal struggle that each one of us has to overcome on our own and discern the best manner in which to calm this clash of confusions. That is not to say, however, that there is no objective solution at all. While we may be traveling along different paths, our destination is one.

O you who believe, celebrate the praises of Allah and do so often; Glorify Him in the morning and the evening.

[Qur'an, 33:41]

These points, first and foremost, are a reminder to myself. Unfortunately, faith once entered into the heart does not function as a vaccine making us immune to falling astray. Unless we strive to diligently apply them each and every day for the duration of our prescribed time in this life, we run the risk of falling back into the trap and confusing our means with our ends.

What is most imperative is that we keep alive the remembrance of Allah (Glory be to Him) within our hearts, for "without doubt, in the remembrance of Allah, hearts do find satisfaction" [Qur'an, 13:28]. In order to achieve this all-encompassing awareness of our Creator, we need to unceasingly ponder and reflect upon the myriad of reasons we owe our gratefulness to Allah (Glory be to Him). The opportunity of being able to work for Islam by serving the Muslims on campus without any fear of harassment or persecution is a great blessing in itself. Not to mention the privilege of being able to attend an institution as fine as the University of Toronto. This realization of the blessings so graciously bestowed upon us by Allah (Glory be to Him) will, *Insha'Allah*, serve to remind us of our duty to share them unhesitatingly with others and utilize our skills and talents for the betterment of our communities and the Muslim community at large.

Moreover, to achieve this higher state of awareness, we must first attempt to elucidate what it is that Allah

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Revisiting Poetry

The story begins with a young Muslim frosh who, after spending a night on the ninth floor of Robarts Library (cramming for his engineering or science exams – how stereotypical!), stumbles across a piece of literature that appears to make much more sense than the pile of books he has just whizzed through. As he seeks to explain this unexpected occurrence he remains dumbfounded and puts forth the question: Why?

Because.

To understand the power of poetry we are really dealing with a force that is of Adam-ic proportions. Though seemingly cloaked in a shroud of words, rhymes, and rhythm that can be analyzed and governed by the intricate laws of language and convention, poetry manages to escape such limitations and paint a picture that only the heart can comprehend. As if in the form of the *insani*-clay itself, the poem is the nest for the celestial bird that has its eyes set towards the heavens. Poetry is the triumph of man – to not only use language, but to use it so eloquently that even the angels complain:

Of dust was he created but his sights so other-worldy![1]

So capable is the human and so much power is displayed through the mastery of language that it is only the Creator Himself who must interject to teach Adam the reality of his claims to "*naming things.*" After all, the greatest challenge to man in the Quran is to "*produce a verse like it*" (Quran, 2:23), demonstrating that no matter how great we may be at using language, it was God who initially taught us the "names of all things."

For the Muslim, no point is more important to understand. While poetry may package a force that seems to be embedded in the poet's ink, its true allure comes from the acknowledgement of our loaned ability to name. The wonderment in poetry and, specifically, the attraction that makes it so easy to remember and so "cool" to be even used as an MSN nickname is really a celebration of our "capacity to name."

This, however, is linked with a responsibility and trust, for man was not taught the names of things so that he may lose himself in words and forget his Teacher. Put together, poetry is more than a human creation with lofty aspirations; it is an expression of thankfulness that stems from the conscious awareness of the "gift to name."

While the thought of poetry may conjure up wild images of messy-haired wine drinkers at the foot of a tree, it is important to re-evaluate the poetic sensibilities that have sustained human (and Islamic) history. The poet is not the de-contextualized mystic but more like the mosque architect who analogously acts upon his gifted ability to comprehend the laws of nature to construct minarets on our vast carpets of existence. The minaret, however, like a piece of well-crafted and fortified poetry, reaches its height only when the muezzin climbs to its top. And it is that call from the minaret, that voice of return, which reaches the innermost trenches of our heart and stirs in it awareness, stealing the moment before the inquirer dares to ask, "Why?"

1. See Allama Iqbal's Qawwali, "Dayare Ishq se..."

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Continued from page 26

(Glory be to Him) wants of us, i.e. what purpose our lives serve, and the role that we play as individuals within the Muslim community. Only then can we assuredly claim to 'know what we're doing.' But to find this information, we need to turn to one source - the book of Allah (Glory be to Him), the Holy Qur'an. It's amazing that we have the ability to be able to read and understand the words of our Creator and through His book we can turn to Him, for the Qur'an is Allah's chosen medium through which He communicates with us. If we do not even know what Allah (Glory be to Him) requires of us, how can we even begin to contemplate how to serve Him?

Surely my prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death are all for Allah the Cherisher of the worlds.
[Qur'an, 6:162]

Only when the realization of our duty towards Allah (Glory be to Him) and His creation are made apparent to us, can we honestly work with the sincere intention of gaining Allah's pleasure. I pray that each of us finds the courage within ourselves to honestly evaluate our intentions and if we find them lacking, to not despair but to turn to Allah (Glory be to Him) for guidance for He alone is the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

The Believers are those who believe in Allah and His Messenger, and then they doubt not; and who struggle hard with their wealth and their lives in the way of Allah; it is they who are the truthful ones."
[Qur'an, 49:15]

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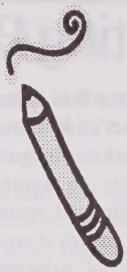
Poetry Corner



Tear

Oh gentle tear don't drip down in pain
Oh silent tear be peaceful like the rain

See it for what it is through your heart may miss
A relief from this world to an eternal bliss

Oh loving tear drip down in prayer
Oh lonely tear drip down knowing your time is near

Console the heart that may be upset
Strengthen the soul that may not be well kept

Oh bitter tear don't drip down in hurt
Oh sorrowful tear know we will all be put back in the dirt

Shireen Patel

Wanting to Go *Home*...

You ask me if this *dunya* is a place I want to roam
Because I keep saying that I would like to go *home*
That isn't even a valid question, is it that hard to guess?
This *dunya*...these distractions are what puts me in a mess
Now, don't go thinking that I want to end my life
No, no...never would I, but it is a strife
But what is this *home* that I speak of?
A *home* other than this material one that I show so much love
This is a *home* not granted to a heedless heart
Home is where we answered, to our Lord, that we would never forget
And now we live away from *home*...remembering not as yet
Home is where I want to be
Gardens Beneath which Rivers Flow is what I want to see
Home is where we all must have met
We left it right after our dunya-days were set
So when I say I want to go home know that it is from my hearts depths
And with the help of Allah I will take all necessary steps
It is the cry of the *nafs*, wanting to go *back* home...

To a Butterfly

And here I am on a patch of green,
Beneath the molten iron's heat,
I forward push my fragile self,
Such mobile yet such tired feet.
From leaf to leaf, from stem to stem,
I crawl. My goal? Not known to me
My limit, this plant, this tree, this mute,
Beyond, my smallness fails to see…
Wind don't whisper! pass by me,
But leave not like a silent breeze,
Cyclone, come! And bring this day,
My freedom from these speechless trees.

_ _ _

Alas! The parting clouds I see,
From deep within, a halo shines,
Came to me a stormy wind,
And sprinkled me with hues divine.
This day, I rise above, beyond,
And through the heavens's gates, I glide,
And look below to see the tree,
In which anymore I need not hide…

Silmi Abdullah

While Enclosed

Let me stare vacantly
As though I can see
Through stone.

While you, with help,
Will build your fence
Inside my home.

On dust, over death
I live, or try
While shelters are torn.

But you are safe
Because I wither
Sealed from your eyes.

The ground I once stood on
That I have been pushed from
Is bruised more than I.

On dust, over death
Behind closed walls
I die.

The Pathopoet

Does Culture Really Matter?!

"O mankind! Verily We have created your from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other"
(Quran 49:13)

Knowing that ayaat how can culture really matter?!
For us Muslims, it should not, Never

In fact different cultures makes relations even more special
Knowing our Unity goes beyond the limitations of culture, color or creed

For Sure we make fun of one another,
But that's just because we love each other....

"The South Asians are infatuated with spicy food like biryani"
"Arabs using Bs for Ps...still can't find a place to bark the car, yah'ni"
"Dem Coolies & da cool accent Mon"...oh got to love the chutney!

Yes learning & teaching our rich cultures can be a bit funny...
But that only makes our lives sweet as honey

"Would not language be a barrier?!"
"No way!", Learn languages! The more you know the merrier

It does not make a difference calling someone habibi or jaan
Or even after dinner you eat baklava, pastries or paan
All that matters is finding someone true in their Imaan

ALHAMDULILLAH Islam is truly a blessing, bringing people from different
nations & cultures together,
Living in harmony, UNITED forever...

Happy Secrets Forever

The Loser's Gain

As I go down the street,
A known, but unknown place;
Mine eyes and his tiny ones meet.
His pupils take pace,

Th'eyes becoming wide, keen;
Mine becoming his.
It's green to black and black to green,
While we both reminisce.

But it's clear the winner—
Who's so pricless and pristine.
As opposèd to the sinner—
Who's yellow and unclean.

Else, I'd with him, spend hours;
Break my candy in half—
And both loving M&M's, our
Ties'd be out the graph.

Winners, who they say are clever,
Make sure Mathies decay.
Winners, they say, stand forever;
Instead, I walk away.

Rashida Morisiya

Empower Yourself! Let your creative juices flow...join the MSA's very own Poetry Society! Email muslimvoice@yahoo.ca for more details.

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Having Respect for Your Parents

Being in university can sometimes be overwhelming. There's so much to get done that it's no wonder students often find themselves wrapped in a cocoon of work. As we contemplate our death and the last days, however, it becomes ever more clear to us how much we take for granted while trapped in this cocoon. It reminds us that we must pray each *Salaah* as if it were our last. It shows us that we should not waste our time, as there may be very little of it remaining, and Allah (Glory be to Him) knows best. This contemplation reminds us to be grateful for every opportunity that is afforded to us, and every luxury we have.

With all of this remembrance and contemplation, I would like to submit one comment:

There is something that we have forgotten to be grateful for. I'm talking about two people that are such a stable fixture in our lives that it's a wonder we remember them at all. At the same time, these people are the most important in our lives and eminently deserving of our remembrance.

The first time you fell off your bike, they were the ones that picked you up. They did it again the first time you fell in life.

When you felt the most alone, you never looked behind you. But if you had, you'd have found them there, holding you up, supporting you all the way. You were never really alone at all.

When you were making the most important decisions in your life, unsure of the road you were embarking upon, they were there to lend their wisdom, to push you to be your very best, and then some.

When everything seemed difficult, when your life seemed like everything was a sacrifice, I guarantee you that their sacrifice was greater. I also guarantee you that they complained much less.

These are just a handful of the marks of the love of a parent for their children. These are what we have forgotten to take into account. As students, it is very easy to get busy with exams and assignments and studying. It is common to become wrapped up in our own lives, and we can't really be blamed for that. But it is essential to take the time to remember that there are lives that have touched ours in ways that we can only begin to grasp, that have sacrificed more for us than any other, and that have made sure our lives continue on the straight path. Remembering our parents should be something that is done everyday.

Pleasing your parents is definitely pleasing to Allah (Glory be to Him). A *hadith* states:

The Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) said, "Pleasing Allah is by pleasing your parents, and angering Allah is by angering your parents."

[Narrated by Ibn Amru Al Aas]

Something as simple as a smile and a hug, or a cup of tea made at the right time, could so easily brighten the day of someone who has been the brightness in your life for so long. A kind word can go a long way, a kind gesture even further. And if you find yourself too wrapped up for any of this, simply remember them. If you can do nothing more, grant them the respect of realizing what they have done for you, and be grateful.

Perhaps most importantly, remember your parents in your *du'aa*; when you pray to pass that last final that you barely had any time to study for, unwrap yourself from all of that and make *du'aa* for mom and dad.

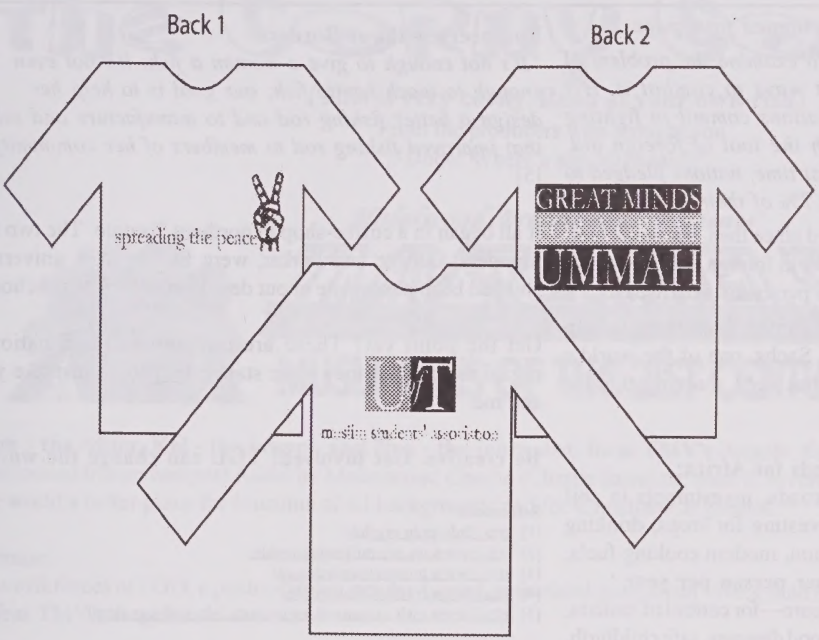
And Allah (Glory be to Him) says in His Book:

And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour.

[Surah Al-Isra', Verse 23]

Fathima Thaha
2nd Year, Life Science/Psychology

Narrated by Abu Hurairah, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "May he be disgraced and humiliated, may he be disgraced and humiliated, may he be disgraced and humiliated." His companions said, "Who oh Messenger of Allah?" He said, "the one whose parents attain old age, or one of them, and he enters Hellfire (by not serving them)."



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International Development Continued from page 25

commission of world leaders to examine the problem of growing poverty and suggest ways to combat it. His recommendations: that rich nations commit to fighting poverty, in particular through the tool of foreign aid. This was agreed to. For the first time, nations pledged to increase their foreign aid to 0.7% of their GDP.

This promise has been reaffirmed since then, but never met. Today, we give 0.29% of the GDP in foreign aid, or roughly $3 billion - but only 28 cents per person on a daily basis.

You might ask yourself - How much does it cost to help people escape poverty? Jeffrey Sachs, one of the world's most pre-eminent economists, has been studying this for decades and has an answer:

Average annual financing needs for Africa:

- Basic infrastructure—roads, investments in soil health, water harvesting for crops, drinking water and sanitation, modern cooking fuels, electricity: **$45 per person per year.**
- Basic health care—for control of malaria, AIDS, TB, childhood diseases, safe childbirth, nutrition and family planning: **$30 per person per year.**
- Upgrading primary and secondary education: **$15 per person per year.**
- Other high-priority items: **$10 per person per year.**

Total needed investments = $100 per person per year.

What pays for these needs?

- Domestic budgets cover as much as **$40 per person per year** if these poor countries push hard (but not punitively hard) on mobilizing local resources.
- A very small part comes from the out-of-pocket spending of the extremely poor.
- The remaining **$60 gap requires international help.**

Right now, these countries receive around $10 per person per year in aid that is directed at these priorities. The unmet need is therefore around $50 per person per year.

How do you spend your free time?

Kids can Free the Children

Free the Children was founded by a young Canadian, Craig Kielburger, in 1995. One day, while getting ready for school, Craig reached for the comics section of the newspaper to have his laugh for the day. Craig loved to read the comics! Suddenly, he saw on the front page of the Toronto Star a picture of a boy wearing a bright red vest with his fist held high. The headline read "Boy, 12, murdered for speaking out against child labor". [4]

Engineers without Borders

"It's not enough to give a woman a fish; it's not even enough to teach her to fish; our goal is to help her design a better fishing rod and to manufacture and sell that improved fishing rod to members of her community." [5]

It all began in a coffee-shop in northern Toronto. The two co-founders, George and Parker, were friends from university and had been passionate about development while in school.

Get the point yet? These are international and national organizations, but they were started by people just like you and me.

Be creative. Get involved! YOU can change the world!

References:
[1] http://hdr.undp.org/hd/
[2] http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/
[3] http://www.pointsevenpledge.ca/
[4] http://www.freethechildren.org/
[5] http://www.ewb.ca/content/en/projects/whywefocus.shtml

Humairah Irfan
Vice President, Public Relations
Engineers without Borders
University of Toronto Chapter

Muslim Unity Continued from page 24

'Canadianized version of Islam'. Thus, the media has had a field day with this divide in the community, and have used it as an argument to create even more barriers for the implementation of Islamic arbitration in Canadian courts. They ask, if Muslims are so scared of it, shouldn't Canadians be as well?

There is a divide in the *Ummah* on many fronts. Sect-based divides, ideological differences, and even cultural barriers are only a few causes. I feel this disunity is the biggest challenge to our attempt to preserve a united Muslim identity. Whether you belong to group A or B, or have your own group, the key is to remember that our aim should be to do what is best for the greater good, the *Ummah* at large. Our *Ummah* is made up of more than a billion people *Alhamdulillah*. We will always have our differences, our distinct opinions, ideas and experiences, but we should always strive above all else to preserve the unity that Allah (Glory be to Him) has mentioned in the Quran and that is the strength of our religion.

Noor Javed

The Corny Corner

(This is very corny. Read at your own risk)

From the producers who brought you
'Dude! Where's my Miswaak?!'

Halalwood Productions Presents

TMV'S ANGELS

MUSLIMAHS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Asm - the editor, Kal - the lawyer, and Nuz - the journalist, form TMV's Angels: the most sophisticated and intellectual trio on campus! Aided by Muhammad Charlie (Charlie found the truth & reverted!), their mission is to make the world a better place for Muslims of all backgrounds and for Canadians in general.

Premise:
The evil forces of FOO, a poetry-hating, gender-biased, embedded-journalism loving mad man will stop at nothing to defeat TMV's Angels.

BUT, what do our Angels have to say about this?

Nuz: "Journalists have to be true to their profession; we'll show him the pen's mightier than the sword!"

Kal: "I was so angry to hear Foo uses pirated software… Oooo when I get my hands on him, I'll show Foo the place of women in the public sphere!"

Asm: Roses are Red
Violets are blue
Foo's gonna be history, like MS-Dos
Coz I'm THE BOSS!

TMV 4 LIFE

TMV'S ANGELS coming to an MSA Event near You!

Reviews:

South Asian Classical Music Society:
This movie will 'Ta-Thay' at the box office, 4 sitars out of 5!!!

Ahtisham at the movies:
As Salaamu Alaikum brothers and sisters, may I have your attention please! This movie is a must- see - just like biryani at MSA events.

Some Arab brother:
I love the movie. Foo was big broblem but TMV Angels used their bower and all was okay - *Ana Mapsood!*

Muslimahs on campus:
GO GIRLS GO!!! We especially loved the special guest star; the executive assistant of TMV, 'Hunky,' coming to the aid of the Angels.

Meet the *REAL* MSA Execs...

Please note that all the MSA Executives are excellent people who are dedicated and hard-working. This segment of The Muslim Voice is not meant seriously, and should not be taken so. In light of this warning, have fun...

Mohamad Alameddine, President

And the award for corniest person of 2004-2005 goes to

our very own MSA president, Mohamad, aka Almo! Becoming a father has truly made him more of a cartoon character than ever. While his insightful and enlightening reminders at zuhr prayer can move you to tears, his outrageous jokes can send you on a roller coaster ride of unstoppable laughter. So if you think you know funny, think again. In spite of that, being the biggest guy on the exec, when he stands up with a stern expression on his face towering over all else, you can actually see the faces around the table turn white with fear. Funny *and* Scary...now that's an unheard of combination. But then again, it's the MSA we're talking about here.

Favourite Movie: Grandizer

Asma Maryam Ali, Vice President, Sisters

Asma Ali is celebrated for her confectionery talents and is

hailed by many to be the Muslim Betty Crocker. Also acclaimed for her excellent driving skills, she's owner of the MSA mobile and the unofficial MSA driver and transporter-of-stuff. She never has a mean thing to say and loves to put a smile on your face by giving out neat gifts (like warm fuzzy socks to slip into on a cold Saturday morning). She is never opposed to a good giggle, and laughs it up at the MSA meetings. But speaking of MSA meetings, Ms. Ali, as she likes herself to be referred to, can be devastatingly philosophical and when she's bored it's quite an adventure to examine her spaced out-ness.

Favourite Movie: Anne of Green Gables

Faraz Siddiqui, Vice President, Brothers

There's something unnerving about Chico. I mean, even

'chico' is weird. But once you get past the uncanny feeling, he's a pretty decent dude. Oh, did I say dhood? Yeah, he's sold out to PSF events on enough occasions. Guess the MSA just can't satisfy all of his needs. And by dhood, he's got some weird tastes. On a more serious note, Faraz is sometimes the voice of reason in the MSA meetings (where reason sometimes gets left behind when corny jokes start being told). He also has this strange notion that as VP Bros, he's destined to challenge Shuaib to a duel. Some are of the opinion that this is unlikely. Regardless, if you're Shuaib, watch out. In fact, if you're a brother, watch out too. You know what, just...just watch out.

Favourite Movie: Mulan

Aaida Mamuji, General Secretary

What can we say about Eye-da? She does the funniest imitation

of a Pakistani auntie's accent. Word on the street is that she raps. Which is rather scary. Make that terrifying. She's also got the dozen-rings-I'm-so-bling thing going on too...But hey, on the other hand, she's the brains behind the operations; the mastermind who works day and night even from foreign countries. With a dad whose ancestry is Southeast Asian, and a mom whose ancestry is Arab, Eye-da is...unsurprisingly confused. Which explains why she spends her summers in Kenya, just in case you were wondering. But then again, she's pretty upbeat. So that's that.

Favourite Movie: Lara Croft Tomb Raider

Adeeb Sharif, Treasurer

This man runs the finances of the MSA. He has all your jumuah

donations. I mean, he's counted your...you get the point. He's in commerce, if that's any consolation. Alright, enough of that. we gotta give it to you straight up – Unless you've been living under a rock for the past year, you'd know that he's an artist, but has to resort to "stealing colour pencils from my mom's daycare." Adeeb is also fond of drawing ducks. This brother is well taken care of by his entourage of eight life-sci groupies who like to follow him around. Everywhere. Perhaps they're waiting for their own chance to get in on the coloured pencils business.

Favourite Movie: Tupac Resurrection

Shuaib Ally, Communications Director

Shuaib is arguably the most eccentric character on this year's exec. Shuaib can be seen (or more appropriately, Can't be seen!) skitting around the U of T campus trying to avoid his MSA peers, lest they give him work to do. He's infamous for his lack of head-hair and his I'll-laugh-at-anything-that-moves

attitude. He's also willing to partake in anything evil, even if it means making fun of you in your presence. But don't try doing the same to him unless you want to hear him rhetorically question, "do I look retarded to you?!" And under no circumstance should you ever bring up his secret desire to get his beard henna'd. He's still in the closet on that one. And to top it all off, Shuaib eats glue and is really scary. So don't work with him unless you have to.

Favourite Movie: Care Bears The Movie

Ahtisham Ashraf, Events Coordinator, Brothers

Now here's the epitome of the typical male whose ego matches the size of a hot air balloon. Ahtisham thinks he knows everyone so well, you'll often find him propounding theories on the nature of Muslim girls and the kind of events that best cater to their needs. So don't be horrified if he decides to run for the Sisters Events Coordinator next year. For sisters, it'll be for your own good (according to Ahtisham of course). And he's got about 12 nicknames that we dare not mention. But that's just the last time we checked, meaning the number could of course have increased exponentially. Aside from that cheekiness, he's bound to be the most jolly, happy-go-lucky chap you'll meet.

Favourite Movie: Beauty and the Beast and Cinderella

Hajera Khaja, Events Coordinator, Sisters

Hajera has an odd habit of writing notes to the closest person to her at MSA meetings. She is also fond of origami. And look, honestly, we have nothing against poetry. And those who write poetry. But it is rather strange to write an *Ode to a Fruit Fly*. That's just... wrong. As if you've been studying a tad too hard for genetics. This might come to you as a surprise, given that she tends to keep it quiet. Most people are under the (mistaken) impression that she's pretty low-key. But its part of an elaborate hoax, trust us on this one. She's one of the more potentially lethal sisters on campus. Make fun of her at your own risk. She can drop it like the best of em'.

Favourite Movie: A Bug's Life

Gamal Seif, Dawah/Outreach Coordinator

Boy, what an ego. Bigger than a camel, for real. It must be an Arab thing. Make that, an Egyptian thing (hard G). Just don't call this man "hard-G" Gamal. Nothing annoys him more. Which is why he seems to be going for 'Jamal'. I'm dead serious. It's actually quite amusing, his ability to go from ridiculously bored during the most heated debate, to red-faced "you better run fast cause you can't say Gamal like my mom does". On the upside, if you can learn to tread lightly around him where sensitive issues are concerned, you'd be safe. And you'd find out that he's a really nice guy. (On that note, Egyptians are nice, in general.)

Favourite Movie: Doctor Dolittle

Aasim Hasany, Community Affairs Coordinator

Circle, circle. Or was it boundaries, boundaries? Sigh... we may never know. This year's head of Community Affairs is likely more suited for the Remarkably Abstract Affairs committee. A poetry junkie, he's one of those persons who wish to discuss all of history, philosophy and anthropology... all in one sitting. If he ever asks you, 'So what do you think of postmodernism,' run. Very fast. And another word of caution: if you do wish to engage his more, shall we say, pensive side, don't venture into the history of India and Pakistan. Unless, of course, you really want to see chairs fly at the ISC. Lowdown? Smart guy, scary tendencies.

Favourite Movie: the Star Wars Trilogy

Tahereh Garshasb, Students for World Justice

What shall we say about Tahereh? Really, our first thought was that its way difficult to make fun of her... she's too nice for that. But then it hit us like a ton of bricks – it's all a front. And that sorta shed new light on old events. Like the mild incident of vandalism in the MSA office. We had eliminated all other possibilities but her. But when asked, she merely chuckled. And you can't really accuse her when she chuckles. So we took that as a no. But now we're not so sure. How can someone be so happy with themselves? It's not fair. In short, we think there may be something behind the front of zen-like calmness. Just be warned.

Favourite Movie: Mortal Kombat

Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, Religious Accommodations

Don't let that immaculately measured fist-length beard and the serious expression Ahmed always wears allow you to pass him off as 'just another brother'. It's just a façade he likes to put up because of his title. But underneath that somber exterior, he's a kid who's been deprived the joys of indulging in cartoon viewing. And this may come as a huge surprise to you, but he can actually crack a joke now and then. Gasp! In fact, he can

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Meet the Real Execs Continued from page 35

be quite the funny man once you get to know him. But never ask him to repeat his joke if you missed it. Out comes the shy, bashful face again as he goes, "no, no...nothing." It's only good while it lasts.
Favourite Movie: Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory

Mubdi Rahman, Academic Affairs Coordinator
Infamous for his painfully corny jokes, when Mubdi isn't

diligently working away at improving his larger-than-life year plan, he's busy recruiting young, unsuspecting frosh into his "I'm a kid away from home and need all the support I can possibly extract from the MSA and Hart House" club. So frosh, beware! And to add to his already rainbow-coloured character, he's also the MSA's self-proclaimed Sherlock Holmes, so if you ever need a vandalism detective, Mubdi's your man. Moreover, (you'd think we'd be done and couldn't possibly have more to say about him, but sadly enough, we do...) Mubdi's also acquired the title of 'cookie monster.' How in the span of a few months he's managed all this is quite an enigma. Kudos to him on that at least, if nothing else.
Favourite Movie: Battlefield Earth

Asmaa Hussein, TMV Editor
Our TMV editor is a true nerd in the grandest sense of the

word! And she doesn't shy away from this intrinsic nature of her's one bit. Which is what makes her so scary. So unless to wish to join Asmaa's not-so-secret cult entitled 'Nerds United for World Domination,' we'd strongly suggest sprinting off in the opposite direction the moment you spot her. And if you're walking around campus in the winter, you're bound to see Asmaa sporting a funny hat with a chicken on it. You are what you wear... someone should turn that into a saying. And then there's her mysterious obsession with clip-art. Another cult in the works? Maybe. But in the meanwhile, this fixation could potentially translate into a "Your Favourite Clip-Arts" article in the next TMV issue.
Favourite Movie: The Dictator

Choose the next MSA executives to represent YOU in MSA's March election! For more information on the election, contact msa.exec@utoronto.ca or visit http://muslim.sa.utoronto.ca

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Your Favorite Hangouts at UofT:

- ISC 37.5%
- Bahen Centre 25%
- Robarts Library 12.5%
- Hart House 12.5%
- 21 Sussex Club House 12.5%

Comments:

- I'm not telling. If everybody found out my fav. place...then it wouldn't be my fav. place anymore!

- Bahen labs, cuz i LUV to eat there ;)

- Robarts. It's so big that you can just huddle in a corner for hours without being seen.

- Bahen Center All the fun of ISC but with nicer washrooms

- ISC has lost its vibe lately - call me crazy, but 21 sussex is my new hangout place! u know, the cute little namaz place there, the awesome computer lab...MSA office...! what else could one ask for?

- Arbour room @ hart house. cuz it has good food and a nice jazzy intellectual atmosphere that gives you the illusion of being part of the smart elite at a school.

- The ISC(International Students Centre) because not only can you pray there, but I feel it is the BEST place to study on campus, especially cumberland (very quiet and peaceful that cumberland be, oh yes), smells very...umm...international (ie. GREAT!!!), and only serious students hang out there (to study, of course) so I have absolutely NO DISTRACTIONS WHAT-SO-EVER...lol :D

- I am gonna have to say ISC...This can be the one and only place since it brings together great diversity and allows students a great opportunity to socialize and study. Did I mention study...oh yes...I get most of my studying there...It's multifunctional to me...I pray, I play, I eat, I study and I also sleep there. It's like a home for me.

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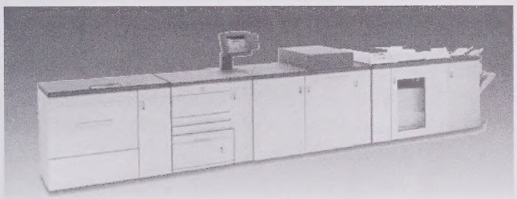

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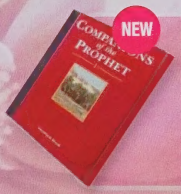

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